

Stranger Potter by ordinaryguy2

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Summary: It begins when Dumbledore is called to Hawkins, IN, because two young witches were found in a lab being tested on by the Muggle government. And one of them is related to the Potters due to a older squib brother of James. Things change drastically from there. Originally made as a fanfic challenge. I've decided to try it myself. AD/RW/GW/MW/SS/DM bashing. HP/HG. Manipulative Dumbles.

1. Chapter 1 - Stranger Beginnings

Stranger Potter

By Ordinaryguy2

July 18, 1979

Hawkins, Indiana

The Hawkins police car rolled to a stop at the side of the road near the crossroad.

After the opening the door, the tall, craggy uniformed man reluctantly got out. Stretching his arms, he twisted his neck until he heard a pop. He let out a groan as he gave the stubble on his face a scratch while glancing around.

"Figures nobody'd be here," he complained as he leaned against his patrol car.

It wasn't until he was about to light a cigarette that he heard someone speak out.

"No one other than you and I, as you requested, Constable Hopper."

Having been caught off guard, Jim Hopper almost pulled out his Smith & Wesson, his hand stopping an inch from the holster. He let out a heavy sigh and swore.

Under an old oak tree not fifteen feet from where he'd been parked, stood an old man with a long, white beard wearing medieval traveling robes that were mostly blue, but with strong highlights of yellow and orange.

"Damn, it's too early to see colors like that," Hopper groaned, rubbing his eyes.

"Really?" said the white bearded man as he considered his garish robes. "I thought this fitting for these wooded locale. Perhaps a deep green and yellow? Or maybe a purple?"

Hopper held up a hand, requesting a pause, using that brief moment to pick up his fallen cigarette and lit it. "You had yourself under disillusionment?"

The bearded man tilted his head as he regarded the lawman. "A notice-me-not spell," he admitted.

Hopper grunted. "Stupid name for a spell." He took a deep drag from his cigarette. "Look, you're Dumbledore, right?" He was rather certain that was the case since he couldn't imagine anyone else wearing something so outlandish. The man's peculiar tastes were so infamous, even Hopper had heard tell of them all the way on this part of the planet.

"Yes, I am Albus Dumbledore, Supreme Mugwump of the ICW, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot of Magical England, and Headmaster of Hogwarts; and if we are confirming credentials, you, sir, I take it are Constable -"

"Police chief," Jim corrected. "Chief of Police Jim Hopper of Hawkins, Indiana." Jim Hopper had only recently moved back to his hometown and took on the role of head of the police department. His career in the big city had nosedived after his little girl had passed away. When his wife left him, he had to get away, so he went back to what he knew. It wasn't anything special, but it paid what bills he had. And other than breaking up some drunks every now and then and stopping some teenagers doing something stupid, things were usually quiet.

"Very well, Chief of Police Jim Hopper, you contacted me to pay back a debt owed to me by your family."

Hopper response was to turn and spit to the side of the ditch. "Yeah, if I wasn't a squib... well, hell, life would look really different right now, for sure. But way before my father, Riccand Spurboot, kicked me out for not being magical, you evidently saved his sorry butt from some of Gellert Grindelwald's goons during WWII."

"Is that why you, instead of your father, have contacted me?"

"My father's dead. Him and my brother died almost a decade ago

poaching gryphons or something like that. But, me, I guess being a squib means having just enough magic in me to make me liable for owing a family debt to you." With that, Hopper turned and punched the side of his patrol car twice, hard enough to leave a small dent.

"And you resent that?" the solemn wizard redundantly asked.

Hopper didn't turn to face the old wizarding hero. "I resent the fact that when I needed wizards to help my dying daughter I was flat out rejected. Because being a squib didn't make us good enough for magic. Still, it makes it so I am supposed to pay back my damn father's debt to you if I'm able." His fist slammed down on the top of his car, leaving a smaller impression.

Albus Dumbledore stood there quietly as he contemplated this moment. He gave the younger man time to compose himself, and took out his own pipe.

Finally, Jim turned around leaning back heavily against his car. "I thought about just blowing my damn head off instead of calling you. I really did. But I had a reason not to. You see, while you magical bastards won't help squibs or muggles, I know you will help your own kind. And that is why I called you here."

"You know someone magical in need of help?"

"See! I knew you'd jump at that! You magical bastards are all alike!"

"Enough!" Dumbledore barked, now approaching the patrol car. He could smell the alcohol on the man now. "I am well known for being fairhanded in my dealings with witches and wizards, squibs and even magical creatures. My dealings with muggles have been fewer, but I do not travel often in that world unless necessity needs. I am fair-minded and not like your father!"

"So you say!"

"Yes, I do! And when I hear that someone is in trouble, I do what I can. Now tell me what it is you contacted me for, and stop comparing me with your father."

Jim could feel some of the power pouring off the old man in front of

him. It made him feel even more frustrated. Even more bothersome was that inner need to repay his father's debt to the man.

"Turn off the power show and we'll talk," he finally spoke.

Albus was a bit surprised at the other man, but he did reign in his aura. Most people caved right away when he would pour out his power. This man was different. Almost as if he was punishing himself.

Jim took another pull from his cigarette and blew smoke. "My father would do that aura crap when he would practically kill me trying to get me to do some accidental magic."

"He evidently wasn't a very decent sort," Albus commented.

That drew a dry chuckle from Hopper. "Nope, not him. I probably turned out ten times better than him by simply getting adopted by strangers."

Albus cleared his throat. "Is there a time frame to this matter you called me about?"

Jim glanced at his watch. He pretty much knew what it was going to show him. He sighed. "Yeah, all right, let's get down to business."

Leaning back further, he crossed his legs. "I've only been police chief here a few months, but because I was a squib I was contacted by an auror that works in this general area. You know, in case things get too out of hand. You see, there was a problem noted when a child was to be informed of their magical status and acceptance to Ilvermorny."

"The colonials largest magical school, I believe," noted Dumbledore.

Hopper snorted. "Yeah, that place. Anyway, the auror, goes by the name of Topknot, he said that there are two young witches being held in a muggle facility."

"What facility?" the wizard said with some alarm.

Jim haphazardly pointed down one of the roads. "Hawkins National

Laboratory. It's just down there. Some kind of research lab. Government run. Lots of military hush-hush stuff I think from all the guards I saw when I took a peek at the place." He took another drag on his smoke. "Anyway, they're conducting experiments on the girls."

"Isn't the MCUSA Law Enforcement doing anything about this?" Dumbledore asked, still confused as to why he was called. This clearly threatened the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy. While he didn't always agree with the MCUSA, he knew they wouldn't risk allowing the exposure of the Wizarding world.

"Sure they are. They're raiding the place in about two hours, which is why I have you here just after the butt-crack of dawn. See this is how I am paying you back that family debt. At least one of those witches is British. Her name is Kali Prasad. She was the one just turned eleven."

The name clicked in Dumbledore's head. She was a half-blood and had been kidnapped several years ago. Her parents, who had been living in Muggle London, had been outright killed. Her mother's parents, the Patils, had used their wealth and strong connections to uncover who had done the travesty but had come up with no results.

"The other girl I'm told is Jane Ives," continued the police chief. "Her mother is Terry Ives. I went to see her yesterday. Those bastards did something to her mother when she went and tried to rescue Jane on her own. Her brain is like fried. I don't know how, but the auror was able to determine that the father of Jane is one Frederick Duffer."

Albus nearly choked on his pipe. He'd been to the funeral of Charlus and Dorea Potter less than three months ago. Frederick Potter had been their first-born, a squib who had left due to prejudices of the magical society, and changed his surname to Duffer.

That amused Jim. "Yeah, I thought that would get your attention." It had been while waiting to see a magical physician for his daughter that he'd happened to read a magical newspaper lying about in the waiting room. In the foreign affairs section it mentioned Dumbledore taking a stand against the most recent dark lord. The Potters were one of the families to immediately join him. "So here's where I ask you to do something."

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow. One did not pay off a family debt by asking something in return. Still, he was curious. "And what would that be?"

"These girls, if they have decent family, make sure they get to them. If they have scum for family, make sure they are brought to someone who will actually care for them. Also, check on them, damn it. I've been an officer of the law for over a decade, and kids get shafted more often than not if people don't check on them. You're a big name. People won't mess with them if they know you are checking on them."

"What is your reason for asking this?"

Taking a final puff, Jim tossed the butt away. "I couldn't get your magical world to help me with my daughter, I can at least get you bastards to do right by these two girls."

The wizened man considered what he was being asked. True, he didn't have to comply with this simple request. But it would at most only cost him a little time; less if he delegated someone else to check on them. He would also be returning two young witches to Magical England, a place where the magical population had been dropping considerably recently. Young James Potter would most likely be overjoyed at having a new family member after losing his parents. His new wife, Lily, would appreciate having someone to lift up her bereaved husband. James had only been a toddler when his brother, Frederick, had finally had enough of the bigotry of Wizarding society and left for other lands.

"Very well, I will do so."

Jim breathed a sigh of relief. "Alright then, I am out of here then. If you are going to take those girls back to England, you are going to have to do so before the MCUSA conduct their raid."

Dumbledore frowned at that. Damn, but the muggle was right. The MCUSA were not likely to allow him to take the two children with him if they get their hands on them first. The MCUSA was also not likely to reveal to him what kinds of experiments were conducted on the two girls.

"Very well, I have need to get busy then."

"And the debt my family owes?"

The wizard paused. "Depending upon what I find in this Hawkings National Laboratory; if the situation is as you had told me, then, yes, your family debt will be resolved."

Hopper nodded and open his car door. "Well, hope you succeed. Don't take it the wrong way, but I hope I never see you again." He jumped in and started the car before he could get sucked into any more wizarding matters. Despite the situation, he felt a lightening in his chest. Whether that was due to the family debt no longer weighing down on him or that he'd made it possible for the two girls to have their lives restored, he wasn't sure, but he felt more better about himself than he had in years. He had no doubts in Dumbledore getting the girls out of the facility. As far as Hopper was concerned, the girls were as good as back home already.

Dumbledore smiled and waved as Hopper looked back at him, the wizard's eyes twinkling.

As the patrol vehicle sped away, another man suddenly appeared. "That man is quite obstinate. I think I like him."

"Yes, Alastor, but he has laid an interesting conundrum at my feet."

Albus Dumbledore was no fool. He was not about to come to some secluded meeting without any backup, especially not in these times with Voldemort looking for any way possible to take him out.

"The Potter boy will not doubt be grateful for the return of a family member," added Moody.

Dumbledore was already counting on that. He'd been broaching the idea of having Potter and perhaps a few of his friends joining the group he had organized to face off against Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Potter would fit in nicely in the Order of the Phoenix. Just a month ago, James Potter and his wife, Lily, had faced off against Voldemort in Diagon Alley, and held him back for the necessary time for aurors to begin to arrive. The young newlyweds had become

something of instant celebrities from it.

Yes, returning this girl to the Potter fold would make young James owe him a family debt. The Patils most likely, too.

"Come, Alastor. Let us liberate these poor children and return home."

"You know, this could still be a trap," pointed out the paranoid British Auror.

"I think not. I used legilimency on him just not to check. There is no signs of his mind being influenced. Other than the grief that continues to torment him, he genuinely wanted to help those two young girls." He paused to consider. "I think this may be the start of his healing process."

Moody stretched and stomped his feet. "Well, let's do this. We are burning daylight here. I for one am already looking forward to my bed at home. Those international portkeys do not play well with me. Especially when they go over the Atlantic."

Albus chuckled. "Very well, old friend. Let us see to these two young girls."

October 31, 1981

Godric's Hollow, England

Jane hurried into the kitchen and opened one side of the stove. Using her telekinetic abilities, she had the metal pie tin slowly float out and set on a wooden board on top of the counter.

"The shepherd's pie is done!" she called out, after first wiping her bloody nose with a handkerchief.

"Smells good," a man responded coming in behind her as she hastily tucked the handkerchief away.

"It should. I did everything the way Lily said to," Jane said proudly.

"Then I am sure it will be great. Whether it is potions or just plain cooking, Lily is always one of the best," James boasted.

"Talk like that will give me a swelled head," replied a female behind him.

"Hey, Lily, Jane just took out dinner."

Lily gave James a quick peck on the lips as she passed him on her way into the kitchen. Once at the stove, she gave the meal a quick glance over. "It looks perfect, dear. We'll let it cool some before we get Harry up from his nap, then we'll eat."

Jane nodded happily.

"Now did you wait for James to be here before taking it out of the stove like I told you, or did you do it on your own again?"

Jane fidgeted. "It wasn't like I was going to burn myself. I used my powers to take out the pie."

Lily reached out and put a reassuring hand on the nearly eleven-year-old's shoulder. "You are still learning control, dear. What would have happened if you had dropped it? Padfoot isn't here to eat it off the floor, and the rest of us prefer to have plates on the table."

James snorted in amusement while Jane giggled. She had assimilated well into the Potter household though the newlyweds had never expected Dumbledore to drop off a head-shaven, scared little girl one rainy evening. It had taken Lily just over two months, but Jane finally was won over by her. James had tried hard using humor and gifts to get the eight-year-old to accept him, too. Lily finally had to tell him that he was trying too hard, just as he had first done when trying to win Lily when they were still students at Hogwarts. Realizing she was right, he decided he should ease into things with her. James took to telling Jane of the family lore, and introducing her to the salvaged portraits from the former Potter Estate that had been decimated recently from a Death Eater attack. The young girl seemed to relish learning of her ancestors and the portraits were interested in her, too.

None of that seemed to matter to Sirius who flaunted his canine antics around Jane whenever he visited. Ironically, she told him quite honestly that she preferred him as a dog. Sirius had been amused and

just a bit hurt by that blunt statement. She had warmed up to Remus quickly, and surprisingly seemed to be able to sense the wolf inside of him, too, not that it mattered to her. It was Peter that she was leery about. When asked about it all she would say was that there was something about him that she did not trust and didn't want to be around him. She seemed uneasy around Dumbledore, too, claiming he made her head hurt. Lily didn't like how the headmaster would ask about how Jane's powers were developing. And he'd proven her right later.

Six months after they had got Jane, Lily had been struck with the flu, Dumbledore had asked James to bring Jane over to examine her. He hadn't mentioned that there would be several of his friends from the Unspeakables there to conduct tests on Jane. When James had finally brought her home, the girl had been inconsolable for days. James had been forced to sleep on the couch for a week. While the testing had been bad enough, Jane had also overheard one of the Unspeakables tell Dumbledore that they would like to have her for study for a few weeks. Maybe longer. And Dumbledore had said he would see what he could do.

In order to make it right, James told Dumbledore that he could no longer see Jane and that the Potters were out of the Order of the Phoenix unless he made an Unbreakable Vow that he would never let Jane be away from the Potters for more than a day and that he would see that she came to no harm. The elder wizard hemmed and hawed of the matter, but James refused to budge or change the words of the oath that Lily had written down. Finally, when James offered to let the headmaster study his invisible cloak, Dumbledore relented, and James was allowed back into his own bedroom. Lily had proven that even as sick as she had been that she was a lioness and Jane was her cub.

"I miss Padfoot. Why hasn't he come to see us?" Jane asked. She hated being stuck in this cottage all the time. All because some evil dark lord had singled out her family. Why couldn't the world leave her and her family alone?

James chuckled and playfully mussed up the dark wild hair she had inherited as a Potter. "He's doing things for the Order. He'll be by when he can. And he'll probably have treats for you and Harry, too."

Jane grinned but wasn't completely satisfied with the answer. "What about Selena? She hasn't brought Luna over in a week."

Selena Lovegood had been introduced to Jane when the girl had been with the Potters for over three months. Lily had been friends with Selena who had been a year ahead of the Potters in school. Knowing Selena as she did, Lily had brought her in to help Jane develop her powers. Jane took to Selena's tutelage slowly. Once Jane realized that she wasn't going to be treated like her '*papa*' had, she warmed up to Selena just as she had Lily. Later, after Selena and Lily had given birth within a month of each other, baby playdates had become a normal occurrence while Jane had classes with Luna's mother.

"I'm afraid Luna is still having fits."

"Really?" James remarked. "It's been almost a week."

"She senses something," Jane spoke. "Something is going to happen, and she doesn't like it."

"How do you know that, dear?" Lily regarded James' niece who never failed to have more surprises for them.

"I just do." Jane shifted uncomfortably, wishing she knew more. Sometimes her abilities frustrated even her.

A charmed lamp went off in the corner to let them know that Harry had woken upstairs.

"I'll get him," Jane spoke up quickly, happy for the chance to get away. Plus, the one-year-old was always happy to see her.

She was already halfway up the stairs when Lily called after her. "He's going to need to be changed. Don't try to do that with your powers, all right?"

Jane paused. "Fine," she groused. "I only did it the one time. It was a really gross diaper." She said in her defense before running the rest of the way up the stairs, leaving the two adults alone.

"What was that about Luna?"

Lily allowed her husband to pull her into a hug. "I don't know. I don't think Luna really knows either. But she senses something." She didn't know how she would have handled things without having Selena come over several times a week. She had wanted Dumbledore to allow them access to the Longbottoms, but the wizened wizard had insisted that it would put them all in more risk. As it was Lily still felt as if she were a shut-in. She had also worried about the Lovegoods as they were secretly the Potters main contact since they had gone into hiding. Not even Dumbledore knew that the Potters had had Pettigrew share the secret of their home with the Lovegoods. For extra protection, Lily had *obliviated* Peter of the fact that he had shared the knowledge of where they lived with the Lovegoods. Lily and Selena had cast another Fidelius over the Lovegoods home for safe measure with Lily as the secret keeper.

"Should we tell Dumbledore?"

Lily frowned. She didn't like how her husband still relied on Dumbledore so much. She had seen enough over the years at Hogwarts and in his Order of the Phoenix to know that the headmaster wasn't infallible. The Order was still reeling from the unexpected deaths of Fabian and Gideon Prewett. Plus, Selena had confided in her that she thought Luna might be a seer. That was definitely not something she wanted Dumbledore to know about.

"Let me get ahold of Selena tomorrow. Maybe she has figured out what is bothering poor Luna." She gave her husband a quick kiss before heading for the stairs. "Would you be a dear and check on the biscuits for me? They should be about done."

He grinned, heading for the kitchen. "You know, if you'd let me bring a house-elf here, we wouldn't have to worry about the cooking or even changing Harry's nappies."

"And then I'd be even more bored than I am already," she retorted down to him.

"I don't see how with all the schooling you've been doing for Jane," he answered back. "Even as quick as she picks things up, she keeps you rather busy."

She was truly grateful for Jane being there with them. Teaching the poor child had given her something else to focus on while hiding out from Voldemort who was focused on hunting them for some reason. She still didn't understand why he had such a mad-on for them all of a sudden. The only thing she could think of was that the insane sometimes have one strong fixation. And it would be just their luck that that fixation would be the Potters.

In Harry's room she found Jane helping Harry to stand. Harry was trying to balance by holding one of her fingers and rub his eyes with the palm of his other hand. He giggled as he weaved back and forth, unbalanced.

"That's it. You're doing it," Jane said encouraging to the baby.

"How is he?" Lily asked.

"He's dry," she answered back, not looking away from Harry.

"Probably not for long then." As Lily came over, Harry started to try jumping in excitement once he saw her only to fall on his rear. "Did my little man have a good nap?" she asked picking him up.

"Gaah!" Harry proclaimed, his left hand holding onto the leg of a toy fuzzy black dog. "Pa'fo!"

"I still think he looks like a Snuffles," Lily smirked as she teased the toddler.

"Pa'fo!" Harry argued as he shook the toy in front of him.

"I still can't believe that someday you will turn eleven and head off to Hogwarts."

Lily smiled and glanced over to Jane. The young girl had pulled back her sleeve and was tracing the '011' tattooed on her inner wrist. It broke her heart whenever she thought about what her life must have been like as a little girl. The man who did that to her should have been feed to the dementors and let them choke on him. There were very few people she could ever think that should happen to, but this Dr. Brenner was near top of the list with Voldemort and his sadistic group of lackeys.

"Jane?"

"*'Eleven'*. That's what papa used to call me at Hawkins. Eleven is how old I will be on my birthday next week. And how old I will be when I am sent to Hogwarts."

"Is that what's bothering you, sweetie?" She reached an arm out to pull her in for a hug and Jane stepped away. "Jane, honey, we've been over this. You can stay here, and we'll homeschool you if you want. We'd love to have you stay with us. Really, we do. Harry would miss you terribly if you were gone anyway."

"I don't know," Jane finally said. "I just want to be with you and Harry. James, too." She sniffed, turned and went for the hug that Lily had ready for her. "And Selena and Luna."

"You left out Sirius and Remus."

"And Sirius and Remus," added Jane with a sniff.

She knew that Jane had been building up for an emotional breakdown or breakthrough. Who wouldn't with all she had undergone. In fact, she thought Jane had been handling things quite well for someone her age. It was one of the reasons she and James had already considered homeschooling her for at least a few years before letting her go to Hogwarts.

"Well, your birthday is in a week. Maybe we can get everyone to come to your birthday party. Wouldn't that be nice?"

She wiped away a tear, but managed a smile followed by a nod.

There was a sound from outside that startled them.

From downstairs, James called up, "It's him! Take the kids and get out! I'll hold him off!"

Lily gasped as the realization of just who *'him'* had to be, and that James was basically laying his life out for them to get away.

No! She wouldn't let him do that! She quickly came up with the plan to apparate with the children to Selena's and then return to face the

dark bastard with her husband.

Holding the kids tightly to herself, she twisted in place... but did not leave. Voldemort had already had anti-apparation wards in place.

"That monster!" She tried to think. To think of anything. James always said her mind was her greatest weapon.

Below them, they could hear the exchange of spells and objects being destroyed, sometimes shaking the very cottage.

There had been an old form of magic she had been researching with Selena. It was costly and risky. But it was the only chance for Harry and Jane.

Downstairs, silence suddenly seemed as earthshaking as the battle before had. James, she knew, had to be dead. How could she not give of herself as he had done?

Taking in a steadying breath, she reached out and touched Harry's brow, not picking him up, despite his cries for her to do so. She pulled Jane into a quick hug. "Jane." Her voice threatened to break. "Jane, take care of Harry. I'm going to try something I've been working on. I'm sorry."

Jane looked at her mother-figure in confusion, only seeing Lily's wand at the last moment.

"Stupefy."

Lily quickly moved the girl into the corner with a disillusionment charm over her. Then turned to face Harry again, reaching up to touch his locks of hair on his forehead. She said a few words in Latin, focusing on her intent. With the start of a tear in her eye, she spoke to Harry. "Be good, my little man. And be good to Jane."

The door to the bedroom was blown in as Voldemort stormed in. Lily's wand was summoned from her hand, but that did not stop her from placing herself between the evil wizard and her son.

"Move yourself, mudblood, and you will be spared!"

Why would...? He means to kill Harry! "Not Harry! No! Not Harry!"

"I said move, woman!"

"Not Harry! You may not touch my Harry! You may kill me, but not him!"

"Woman! You have vexed me for the last time! *Avada Kedavra!*"

Voldemort stepped over the woman.

"No one can not say I didn't try to spare the mudblood."

Jane, from her corner of the room, looked on in horror. She'd been able to partially block the stunning spell that Lily had sent at her. Her adrenalin and magic were now pushing the last of the affects away. Before she knew it, she'd jumped to her feet and roughly shoved Voldemort into the wall with her mind, the disillusionment spell over her breaking away to nothing.

"No!" she screamed, hurriedly placing herself between Harry and this monster.

Voldemort staggered to his feet, the front of his robes covered in butt cream and baby powder. "Ah, yes, the other Potter. I heard of you. A bastard child from America. But you will have no mercy. You shall die as will young Harry Potter. Then there will be no Potters for me to concern myself about."

"No!" she yelled again, tears streaming down her face along with blood dripping from both nostrils as her power built within her.

"Yes!" the dark lord snarled back. "*Avada Kedavra!*"

"NOOOOOOOO!"

Voldemort could only be amazed as the green killing curse that left his wand was somehow impeded by strange ripples in the air around the girl, and then just as suddenly, it all came flying at him.

Voldemort's body was basically destroyed to the point that it could be said he had been disintegrated, except there was no matter left

behind, except his wand and some of his clothes. And the rest of the house that had been behind him was also gone.

Young Harry began to cry again. Jane, now the only other living person in the house, lay comatose atop of her surrogate mother.

November 1, 1981

Hogwarts Infirmary, Scotland

Albus Dumbledore looked down at the young girl sleeping in the cot. Why had Voldemort spared her? The only conclusion he could determine was that Voldemort want to study the girl.

"Such a mystery." He wondered if Jane's mother was a squib or a witch. Maybe she had been a muggle. Somehow the potions – or chemicals – that Dr. Brenner had been giving to Terry Ives was the key to producing such a powerful child. A witch of that caliber had not been seen in England since before the Founders of Hogwarts. Maybe even Morgana Le Fay.

He sighed.

And she was sure to protect Harry. And Albus was sure that Harry was a horcrux from the readings he took on the boy's scar. "No, Voldemort isn't fully gone. And he never can be while Harry lives. Voldemort will return and Harry must face him. The prophecy foretells it. Harry must grow up willing to give his life so that Voldemort will perish forever."

"I have to let him grow up alone. Unwanted and dejected." He shook his head. "If only I hadn't sworn that oath to James to not keep Jane from her family."

He looked down at her.

"I cannot keep you from Harry for more than a day. Nor can I allow harm to come to you." He shook his head. "I see no other way to do this so that Harry grows up alone."

Raising his wand, he cast a stasis field around the sleeping girl.

"Albus, what are you doing?"

"Ah, Poppy, yes, I'm afraid that I am going to have to keep young Jane here in a stasis field. How long do you think I can safely do that for?"

Poppy Pomfrey frowned, not understanding the reason for having to do that. Still, her mind did figure out the answer for him. "A young girl her size and weight... about 10 years, not much longer than that. But why? There is nothing wrong with her except exhaustion?"

"Around ten years." He sighed wearily. "About the time young Harry will start attending school here. Yes, that will have to do then." He turned to his trusted school physician who was looking to him for answers. "Thank you, Poppy. It's for the Greater Good you understand." He raised his wand toward the disbelieving Hogwarts physician. "*Obliviate*."

(-)

Author's ChAlLeNgE:

This has all been set up as a challenge for other writers. Hopefully it will have been found interesting enough to be pick up by other writers.

1.) Jane gets released when Harry is attending Hogwarts. Whether that is his first year or up to his seventh is up to you. (Personally, I am interested mostly in his first and fourth year. But that is me.)

2.) Voldemort will focus his energies on both Jane/Eleven and Harry.

3.) As for relationships, I could see Jane/Eleven with Neville and I prefer Harry and Hermione but I will leave it open. Just not Harry and Jane/Eleven because they are related, so ick.

4.) Dumbledore can't harm Jane/Eleven. Plus, he has to allow Jane/Eleven and Harry to stay together, in school and at the Dursleys during the summer.

5.) Dumbledore is manipulative, but is it because he can't see any other way or is he himself evil or going crazy? I wrote my part so that it could be either way, so you decide.

6.) Will Jane/Eleven get to the Upside Down seen in 'Stranger Things'? Maybe that is on the other side of the Veil in the Department of Mysteries. Maybe that is where she blasted Voldemort. Or maybe she created a portal to the Upside Down when she blew up Voldemort. I don't know because no one has written it yet!

7.) Jane/Eleven must reunite with Kali Prasad at some point, even if it is just brief.

8.) Also, I'd like the story to stay clean. I'm going to be letting one of my daughters watch Stranger Things soon, and give her the option of reading these challenges, if they are taken up.

2. Chapter 2 - Stranger Awakenings

Chapter 2 – Strange Awakenings

(Author's Note – I've decided to take my own challenge. Hopefully some other readers will like it enough to do their own version. That said, I have decided to go with the manipulative Dumbledore storyline. There will be AD/RW/GW/MW/SS/DM bashing ahead. There will be a HP/HR eventual relationship as that is the most believable match to me. There will be no explicit scenes or anything close to explicit scenes.)

Jane could hear the voice of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named thunder around her. Baby Harry cried loudly as Jane held him close under her arm. The nursery seemed to get smaller and smaller as the vile wizard stomped purposefully toward the cowering two. She tried desperately to find some place for her and Harry to hide. The crib, the hamper, even the changing table, they all seemed to shrink away to nothingness, giving them no form of shelter. She tried to circle quickly around the amused dark lord, but now there was no longer a doorway to exit.

Suddenly, Harry was being pulled away from her. Jane looked back at Voldemort and she could see him with his hands out summoning Harry to him.

"Noooo!" she shouted.

Harry was crying, as he was being tugged roughly in both directions, but she didn't dare let go of the 15-month old.

"Noooo!" she screamed again as Harry began to slip through her fingers.

"Noooo!" she cried out again, as she sat up, her eyes blinking rapidly as she took in her new environment.

She was among a row of beds, the one she was in was tucked in a corner. The walls were made of stone and covered a large area. The air smelled slightly antiseptic, much like in a hospital environment.

There was a grey-bearded man in a combination of purple and light blue robes quickly approaching her. Recognition was just starting to let her know that she knew him from somewhere.

"Where's Harry?" she immediately asked, even though she wasn't sure who she was asking just yet.

The man shook his head wearily. "I am afraid that is something you shall never truly know, my dear." He brought a stick out of his pocket and pointed it at her. "It is for the greater good. *Oblivia*-"

"Noooo!" She knew just enough to know that this man did not mean her any good. She pushed out at him with her mind, her powers flaring out of her.

Before Albus Dumbledore realized he was in any danger, he had been blasted back to the far wall of the Hogwarts infirmary, destroying the portrait of one old nurse, and knocking down the frames of two other physicians. As the stone dust settled, the broken and slightly smoldering body of the Hogwarts headmaster could be seen half on, half off, a busted hospital bed which had proved just enough to save his life.

"What... where am I?" Jane asked as she now began to comprehend her surroundings. She jumped out of bed in her hospital gown, but had to pause to get her equilibrium.

"Harry?" she called out.

"What happened in here?" called out a commanding female voice.

Jane paused as she saw a woman in a healer's uniform was approaching her from what Jane thought might have been an office.

"Poppy?"

"That is my name," admitted the woman, "now tell me yours and how you came to be here." Poppy Pomfrey tilted her head as she studied the young girl. She looked strangely familiar, but she couldn't determine why.

The eleven-year-old looked at her in confusion. "Poppy, you don't

recognize me?"

Poppy didn't answer, but instead, used a hankie to wipe the blood from Jane's nose. "I don't believe I have laid eyes on you ever before in my life."

"But... you've given me several checkups. The last one was just a month ago."

Poppy shook her head as she began to cast a diagnostic spell on the child. "You must be mistaken, child. I've only just got back from spending the first part of my summer in France visiting family."

Jane's mouth fell open as she tried to make sense of things. "Just how long have I been in this bed?"

Poppy frowned as she noted something odd in the readings she was getting from her diagnostic spell. "This bed shouldn't have even been occupied. Now why don't you tell me how you got here?"

Jane just shook her head in frustration. "Just tell me that Harry is all right!"

Poppy frowned, though she could see the rising panic in the child's demeanor. "Harry who?"

"Harry Potter! Surely you remember him!?"

Poppy was struck still.

"Poppy!" came a shout from the other side of the large infirmary.

They turned just as a large portrait on the fall wall with two nurses in antiquated uniforms began to fall.

"Wingardium Leviosa!"

The portrait and its inhabitants stopped just inches from the floor.

Poppy's eyes darted to the destruction that had obviously been part of the noise that she had heard from her office. "What happened here?" she demanded as she marched toward the mess.

She let out a gasp when she saw the crumpled form of the headmaster. "What happened?" she demanded again, now rushing forward casting a stabilizing spell followed by several quick diagnostic spells.

Jane swallowed. "He was coming toward me. He was going to *obliviate* me."

Poppy's head snapped toward the girl. "Albus? He wouldn't do such a thing!"

Jane stood there watching as Poppy worked on Dumbledore. She was trying to catch her breath, trying to understand what was going on. Why was Poppy acting like this? And why was Dumbledore about to *obliviate* her.

Looking down, she was surprised to see a wand on the floor near her feet. Without thinking, she reached down and picked it up. Sparks flew up, surprising her, as did the power she felt rushing through her.

It surprised her. James and Lily had told her that sparks would appear when a wand chose its master, and it had never happened when she had picked up Lily's wand.

She wanted to ask Poppy about it, but the med-witch was totally engrossed in her work on saving the headmaster.

Quietly, she walked back to the hospital bed she had awoken in. There was no bags or items around it to tell her anything, so she sat down.

Raising her head, she called out, "Can I please speak to a house-elf, please?"

A quiet pop occurred just off to her left. The house-elf was wrinkly, and his ears hung low. His clothes consisted of a worn blue bathrobe that had been left behind by some First Year muggleborn. "Can Clammy be helping, young missy?" he asked in a squeaky tone.

"My clothes," she said, trying not to stare, as she had had few encounters with the servile creatures. "I don't know where they are. Can you retrieve them for me?"

Clammy frowned before coming to a decision. "Clammy be checking the Come-n'-Go Room." With a snap of his fingers, the house-elf was gone.

Jane was only a minute into her breathing exercises when Clammy suddenly popped back into existence, this time with a neatly folded bundle of clothes.

"Thank you," the teen said gratefully as she took the clothes. Ducking behind a privacy curtain, she quickly changed clothes, stopping only to check herself for signs of any injuries. She was unsure what to do with the wand she had picked up, so she tucked it in her sleeve for now. Finally dressed in what she considered real clothes, Jane stepped back around the curtain. But Clammy was gone.

She said on her bed trying to puzzle things out, then had to stop to have a good cry. It was only after she cleaned up her face, she decided she needed some answers right away.

"Clammy?"

The house-elf reappeared with another pop. "Yes, Little Miss?"

"Do you know where James and Lily are being kept?" She could bring herself to say 'James and Lily's bodies'.

Now the house-elf gave her a look of sorrow. "They's is buried at cemetery at Godric's Hollow."

Jane gasped and nearly fell from the hospital bed that she'd been sitting on. Her mind whirled as she tried to remember that night. Listening to the fight between James and Voldemort as it finally went silent. Lily trying to get Jane out of danger. Harry crying. Lily falling to the green spell of the dark lord. Jane shaking off the stunning spell Lily had put on her. Voldemort towering over Jane with his wand aimed at her as it began to glow green. She faced him. The boogey-man of the Wizarding world.

And she screamed.

She pushed everything she had at him. And that was the last thing she remembered.

Was it enough?

Somehow, she had survived.

And James and Lily were gone. Jane had been out of it so long that they were already buried. She hadn't even had a chance to say goodbye.

With the back of her hand, she wiped away the tears that had been falling.

"Clammy, where's Harry?"

The house-elf shifted uneasily, knowing that his answer would hurt the young miss. "Young Harry Potter be staying with his relatives."

Her head snapped up. "His relatives? I'm his relative."

Having overheard this declaration, Poppy dropped the metal tray she'd been carrying over to the potions cabinet to retrieve some of the more delicate potions she didn't dare use *accio* or have a house-elf apparate it over for her.

Ignoring the tray, Poppy marched over to the girl and house-elf. The girl's appearance made much more sense as her features were definitely Potter-esque. "Young lady, who exactly are you?"

The young girl gave the med-witch a look of outrageous disbelief. "Jane. Jane Potter. James' niece."

This left Poppy gaping like a fish for a moment. "But James Potter didn't have a niece."

Jane had to stop herself from physically attacking the well-meaning witch. She stopped, and took in several slow breaths just like Lily and Selena had taught her. "Poppy," Jane finally said. "Is there a way to check to see if you have been memory charmed?"

The med-witch fidgeted, not liking where this was going. Noticing the nervous house-elf, she decided to ask a question of her own. "Clammy, can you tell me how long this young lady has been in this bed?"

Clammy glanced at the hospital bed in question. "Little Miss has been here in bed for ten years."

"No." Jane had fallen to her knees as her mind baulked to process this new information. "No. No. No. No."

Poppy grabbed the worried house-elf's hand to keep it focused on her. "Merlin, Clammy, was she there that Halloween night?"

She didn't have to clarify which Halloween night. He knew. "That be when Perfesser Headmaster Whiskers brings her here."

Poppy found herself sitting over on the floor beside Jane, hugging her to herself. "How could I not know all this?"

Clammy was now nervously chewing on one of his ears. "Perfesser Headmaster Whiskers makes Healer-Witch Poppy forget," he suddenly blurted out.

"How could he do that to me?" she found herself speaking, aghast.

"Poppy," came a muffled call.

The med-witch was embarrassed that she had to loosen her hold on the girl before she was accidentally smothered. "Oh, you poor dear. It must all be so fresh for you."

Jane didn't answer that. Instead, she wiped away her fresh tears with a swipe of her sleeve, not caring that it wasn't ladylike. "I need to see Harry."

"He started his first year here last fall. He'll be in his Second Year this September," Poppy found herself rambling.

Spying the metal tray on the floor, she suddenly remembered she still needed to get the potions to administer to Dumbledore. "I'm really not sure what to do for you right now, but I do have to give the headmaster several potions and administer some poultices as well. I may not be very happy with the man right now, but I want him to live if for no other reason than to explain what he had done to the both of us."

Jane grabbed Poppy's sleeve before the med-witch could fully stand. "But-but James made Dumbledore swear an oath not to keep me away from my family for more than a day! And Harry is the only family I have left!"

Poppy paused in her kneeling position. She glanced over at the house-elf in the old bathrobe. "Clammy, you are always overhearing things. Do you know anything of this oath?"

Clammy was swinging the sleeves of his robe wildly about in his nervous excitement. "Clammy may have been hearing some when Perffesser Headmaster Whiskers make oath to Lord Potter about Little Miss."

"Oh, Albus, what have you done?" she muttered to herself. Glancing back at the house-elf, she said, "Clammy, would you please go and ask Minnie to come down here as soon as possible?"

"But I need to get to Harry," Jane pleaded. Images of Lily on the floor began to build in her mind, and she almost hear Harry crying from his crib.

"Here," the healer pushed a vial towards here. "It's a calming draught, dear. You are starting to make the beds shake with a case of accidental magic."

Realizing that the room was starting to shake, Jane took the medicine. Almost instantly the vision began to recede and the building pressure in head let up. She let out a sigh that was almost a sob.

"That's better," Poppy said. She took a moment to consider things. She didn't have all the information, but she knew some of it.

"If Dumbledore swore an oath stating exactly that he would make sure you were not kept from your family for more than a day, if there were some reason that he could not reunite you, he could have suspended you like you were to make it like no time has passed for you. You wouldn't have been gone for a full day."

"What possible reason could he have for keeping me away from Harry

for so long?" Jane demanded.

Poppy lowered her eyes in defeat. "I really have no idea. But I will help you to find your answers, and see about getting you to your cousin, too."

In under ten minutes, Minerva McGonagall was down in the Hogwarts Infirmary. With Poppy attending to a few more needs of the wounded headmaster, McGonagall walked right in and stared at a child in the infirmary. "Now who are you and how did you get here?"

Jane clutched at her heart. "You don't remember me either?" Minnie had been one of the few people that Lily was willing to consult with about Jane and her abilities. The muggle-born witch had still made her mentor swear a magical oath of secrecy since she hadn't trusted Dumbledore from keeping his great, big beak out of their matters, as well as He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named trying to learn everything concerning the Potters.

"I don't believe I've ever laid eyes on you, lass." Minerva somehow doubted her own words, even though she didn't know the child. Still, there was something there that reminded her of someone, but she wasn't sure.

"Then he *obliterated* you, too." Jane turned away from the stunned deputy-headmistress to look back toward where Poppy and the unconscious Dumbledore were.

Minerva was temporarily stunned by that accusation, even still, she was called down here and she wanted to know why since the house-elf that delivered the message seemed unusually edgy. "Where is Madame Pomfrey?" she asked, deciding to get her answers directly from her friend.

"Poppy's tending to *him* back there." She pointed back to the East wall.

The Scottish witch marched down the stone floor, but nearly stumbled when she saw just who the med-witch was attending to. "What in Merlin's name happened to him?" she cried out.

Poppy looked up to see her old friend. "I'll be with you in just a minute. As for what has happened to him, the old bugger's manipulations have come back to bit him in the arse."

"Poppy!" She was surprised to see her old friend snap like that about the headmaster. True, she could be a bit harsh at times, but Poppy always wore her heart on her sleeve. Still, to say that in front of a child... *What has Albus supposed to have done now?*

"No! Don't you defend him, Minnie! He *obliterated* me! And he hid a patient from me in my own infirmary for ten years!" With the last spell in place, she stepped back to check over her work, not wanting to overlook anything even if she was royally miffed.

"What has happened in here?" Minerva asked as she took in the destruction of the portraits and other objects that could not be totally repaired even by the hard-working house-elves of Hogwarts.

Poppy called for Clammy and asked him to set up an early lunch for three. Poppy began explaining what she had learned and had Clammy confirm what she was telling her friend. Jane had been lured over by the prospect of food, though she was reluctant to engage anyone as she seemed to be curling into herself in her chair while munching slowly on an apple.

"I... I just can't accept this, Poppy." Minerva shook her head. "This goes against everything that I know in my heart that Albus Dumbledore stands for."

The med-witch nodded and pulled up a vial filled with a reddish-blue fluid. "I was afraid you were going to say that, which is why I want you to take this."

Minerva's mouth fell open. "Is that what I think it is?"

"If you think it is a loyalty-potion antidote, then yes."

The transfiguration teacher looked at it in disgust. "I can't believe that you would insinuate such a thing, Poppy. Dumbledore would never use such a potion!"

"Then prove him right and take it," spoke the quite voice of the girl in

the chair. The two elder witches had been so caught up in their conversation that they had forgotten her.

Minerva glared at the vial. "If I take this, and nothing happens, we can drop these accusations?"

Poppy shook her head. "No, I will just think you are a more bull-headed Scot than I had originally thought. I'm afraid there is no question that Albus has done certain things, it's the reason why and to what extent that this will help determine. But if you want to clear him of some of my accusations, you have to take the antidote."

"And why haven't you taken it?" she asked defensively.

Poppy sighed. "Because as a med-witch, I have to go in to St. Mungo's four times a year to be checked for potions. *Obliviating* me is the best he could do, now are you done arguing?"

McGonagall snorted in annoyance. "Fine, give me the damnable thing. But I expect an apology when I prove myself unaffected." She paused as she uncorked the vial and gave it a sniff. "Um, Poppy, I don't know that I have had this before. What taste should I expect."

Poppy shook her head in amusement. "Normally, I would just make my patient take their medicine without any warning, but since it is you... it will taste of chalk, vinegar and a hint of pine needles."

Giving the vial another look, Minerva shrugged. "That shouldn't be too bad. Merlin knows you've given out much worse tasting muck." With that, she downed the entire vial as if it were a shot glass at a bar.

"Now what?" asked Jane, looking up from her apple.

Poppy speared a small potato with her fork. "Now we wait five minutes. If there is a loyalty potion inside her, the antidote will seek it out, and pull it to her colon to expel it."

"You mean..." Jane just pointed toward the bathroom facilities.

The med-witch sighed. "Yes, the toilet would be involved most egregiously. And if it is a particularly concentrated potion over an

extended period of time, it would go out both ways as well."

"Oh, now I didn't need to hear that." Minerva said waving her hand as if to send the entire discussion away. "Have either of you asked Clammy if he or any of the other house-elves have noticed anyone else checking on Jane over all this time?"

Clammy popped back since he had sensed he was wanted. "Youse be wanting Clammy?"

Poppy quickly asked her question.

Clammy twisted the sleeves of his blue bathrobes, knowing that he should be keeping the headmaster's secrets, but at the same time he was being directly asked by Poppy who he really liked. "Clammy thinks Perfesser Headmaster Whiskers comes to see Little Miss three or so times every year."

Poppy regarded Jane who had pulled her knees up to her chest as she said in her chair. The med-witch couldn't help but to damn Dumbledore for his manipulations.

"If Dumbledore did do this," began Minerva, "perhaps there was a medical reason or some other factors we don't know about."

"And we don't know about them because he *obliterated* them from us," snapped Poppy.

"Maybe we agreed to be *obliterated*," Minerva said pointedly, as she grasped for straws. Her stomach gave a loud growl and she hiccupped.

"Clammy, in your time watching over us, did the headmaster ask us permission to *oblivate* us, or did he just do it?"

The house-elf was nervously nibbling on the end of his right ear. "Clammy did not hear Perfesser Headmaster Whiskers asking. Just whooshing with wand."

Minerva was about to ask the elf another question, but expelled a loud belch instead. "Oh, my pardon me, I don't know what overcame me."

"I do," smirked Poppy. "And I think you may have thirty seconds to make it to the loo before it is too late."

Minerva's eyes bulged. Before she could protest, her guts began to make even louder accusations. Realizing that arguing wasn't going to help her, she got up and made a dash for the infirmary's bathroom facilities.

"Will she be all right?" Jane asked, still looking forlorn.

Poppy sighed. "Yes, I think Minerva will be all right in the end." She turned to Clammy. "Clammy, if you would, Minnie is going to require some female house-elves to attend her as she is going to be making a frightful mess in there. There were a few I instructed during that stomach flu epidemic five years ago. They would be ideal for this."

Clammy clapped his hands happily. "Clammy knows just who to call. They's gonna be so happy! Thank you, Healer Witch Poppy!"

And he was gone.

Poppy straightened out her robe. "Well, when Minnie is feeling better, she and I will use our wands to verify that there have been *obliviations* done on us, just as a matter of point," she said to the young girl who was about to say something. "Then, dear, we see about having you meet Harry."

For the first time in a long time, Jane managed a smile.

Tbc

Next: *Jane reunites with Harry. Isn't he in for a surprise?*

3. Chapter 3 - Stranger Relations

Chapter 3 – Strange Relations

Jane hated floo travel. She hated apparition as well. Her preferred means of travel was by broom. James had taken great delight in teaching her how to fly, though Lily often accused him of trying to get his niece killed. Sirius would join James and Jane in tearing through the skies whenever he was able to be there. But be that as it may, she had to agree that floo and apparition were definitely a much quicker way to get places.

Mrs. Figg had been quite surprised to see them. Even more surprised once Minerva had stated that they were going to see Harry Potter. Minerva had been surprised then the old squib had asked her if she had permission from Dumbledore.

Now, though, they stood in front of number 4 Privet Drive looking at a very cookie cutter house that looked like every other one in the neighborhood. The only major difference in the house was the foliage. The Dursley home seemed to focus on rose bushes and a variety of other flowering plants. Another difference was that there were bars on one of the upstairs windows.

"That had better not be his window," Jane stated coldly.

McGonagall frowned but nodded in agreement. "Remember, we are here to see Harry. It would be best to reserve judgment until after that."

A knot began to form in her throat. She wiped her eyes with her sleeve, telling herself she was not going to start crying again, her arms and legs felt as if they were made of lead, but she just had to see her little Harry again, even if he was now technically a year older than her.

As she stepped onto the property, she could feel the wards on the property. "There are wards here?"

Minerva nodded. "Albus mentioned setting some wards here to keep

Harry's location secret as well as to keep him safe."

Jane spread her arms out and lifted her face to the sky. "This feels like... like Lily. It is her magic, but... someone has done something to it. It's been forced from its original intent." She blinked and lowered her arms. "Aunt Min, I don't think Harry is as protected as he should be. Lily made this magic to protect Harry. But now... something is not right with it."

"You're very sensitive to magic," Minerva acknowledged. "But are you sure you are reading it right?"

The girl frowned. "I am very familiar with Lily's magic. She taught me how to read magic. To feel how it flows and how it is meant to work." She gestured to the property of number 4 Privet Drive. "There has been something done here, to her magic, and I think it... it may be weakening Harry."

The older witch shuddered. The very thought of such a ward, and on a child! "I'll be calling in a professional warder to examine the grounds here. If the changes in the wards are affecting Harry, we need to know how, ok?" She took a moment to look over the child. She was nervous, angry, frightened, outraged, and depressed. She wasn't sure how she was going to comfort this child, but she would do her best.

"You called me '*Aunt Min*'. I take it we were close before that Halloween and my memories were *obliterated*."

Jane looked down at the sidewalk and then at one of the rose bushes. "James and Lily brought you in to help me. You helped give me several exercises to help me gain control over my abilities." She found the ants very interesting. "My powers... my magic... has been..." She sighed. "I was experimented on. My mother had procedures done to her be American muggles. They were trying to give her powers. Not the magic kind. Not exactly. But my mother became pregnant with me. It... it changed me. I'm not a normal witch. It's why the Unspeakables wanted me so bad. Because of how insistent they were, Dumbledore was forced to make the vow about not keeping me for family. I don't know why he was trying to *obliterate* my memory, but he's manipulative. Lily didn't trust him. James was beginning to think

the same. But then Halloween happened."

The girl found herself embraced by the older witch. "It's all right, dear. You can call me '*Aunt Min*' again. Just not at school."

Jane gave a soft chuckle. "You said that last time, too."

Minerva nodded, not surprised by that. "Shall we check on my young Gryffindor?"

Jane blinked in surprise. "He made it into Gryffindor? I thought for sure Harry'd be in Slytherin."

Minerva stared in open mouth outrage before walking after her. "You... you take that back!"

They stopped at the door.

"Do you need a minute, dear?"

Jane took several deep breaths, then turned and launched herself at the teacher, wrapping her arms around. "Thank you for bringing me here," she said, though her voice was muffled.

"Of course, dear," Minerva said, allowing herself to hug the child again. She kept herself from doing that often. She had hugged a homesick Lily Evans her first year at Hogwarts. The last child she had hugged had been Hermione Granger the evening after her troll encounter when she couldn't sleep.

Jane reluctantly pulled back and wiped her tears on her sleeve yet again.

Minerva allowed a reassuring smile, then, as discretely as possible, took out her wand and used it to clear up Jane's face and clean her poor sleeve. Glancing down, she noticed some wet splotches on the muggle dress she wore, and dried that, too.

"He won't remember me, will he?" the young girl asked, her lower lip sticking out.

Minerva sighed. "We can't change the past; however, we can take

stock of where we are now, and work to build a better future for all of us." She then nodded towards the door.

Steeling herself, Jane rang the doorbell.

Jane wasn't looking forward to seeing Petunia again. The only time they had met had been at the funeral of Lily and Petunia's parents. Their parents had died in a car crash, but even so, Petunia blamed Lily for it, saying that it must have been due to the war the freaks were having. When James had told her that there were no signs of any magic having been used to cause the accident, Petunia began ranting at him, accusing him of lying and using several words that Jane did not know the meaning of.

A dark-haired woman in her upper thirties opened the door. "Yes, can I help you?" she asked with a ridged smile.

"Mrs. Petunia Dursley?" McGonagall inquired. When the woman reluctantly admitted to her identity, Minerva smiled. "We are in need of seeing Harry Potter, your nephew."

Petunia's eyes widened dramatically. "You're one of them!" she accused. She then preceded to slam the door on them.

Or tried to.

Using her powers, Jane slowly forced the door back so that it was completely open, and then forced Petunia further inside her home.

"Jane, you really shouldn't do that," McGonagall admonished, not really meaning it as she followed after the girl, closing the door once they were all inside. It was only then that she realized that Jane wasn't using a wand. This was not an act of accidental magic like how the girl had blasted Dumbledore; this was controlled wandless magic. And such precise control by someone so young really caught the deputy-headmistress off guard. "How are you able to do that, child?"

Jane wiped her bloody nose with a handkerchief. "We can discuss that later."

Petunia continued to retreat, on her own now, until she was in her

living room. "You have no right to be here!" she declared, her eyes wild.

McGonagall shook her head and gave a look that she would normally reserve for an obstinate child. "Mrs. Dursley," she began, "I need the young girl to see her cousin." Which was true. Minerva would have liked to have learned why Dumbledore did what he did, but she couldn't for now because he was comatose. And then there was the matter of the oath that Dumbledore had sworn to not keep Jane for more than a day away from her family, the deputy-headmistress didn't know everything about the conditions that went into the oath, but she wasn't about to be held responsible for Britain's premiere wizard being reduced to a squid because she had not followed through on this.

"He has other family," Petunia queried, latching onto that tidbit of information. "Then why was he shucked off onto us if there was someone else that could take him in?"

"I was indisposed," Jane responded as she examined the faux-warmness of the furnishings in the room. She then turned to the woman. "You remember me, don't you, Petunia? I was there with Lily at your parents' funeral."

Petunia now stared at the eleven-year-old girl, her mouth falling open. "Not possible," she whispered as the words practically stuck in her throat. "You should be dead. Or at least older." She turned back to McGonagall. "This is some kind of trick!" she accused.

Minerva tutted. "I assure you, this is no trick. This really is Jane Potter. The poor girl has been in a type of magical suspension for the last ten years. She was there the night that Lily and James died. And now she is awake and must see Harry."

As the two women talked, Jane had felt a tugging toward the upstairs. But there was something else, too. There was something dark that emanated from the cupboard under the stairs. Having slowly walked over to it, she reached a tentative hand out and unlatched it, letting the door swing open. She bent down to see what was inside. There were shadows so she reached out to a string hanging from a lightbulb, and turned it on.

It was the sound of the light string being pulled that brought the attention of the two arguing women back to her.

"What are you doing? Get out of there!" snapped Petunia, momentarily forgetting her fear of the girl.

Jane met her halfway, rage pouring off of her. "Why does that wall have writing on it stating that it is Harry's room?"

Minerva stared, shocked at the implications.

Harry's aunt gulped like a fish out of water. "He- he liked to play in there when he was younger," she said desperately, though not very convincingly.

McGonagall turned to the girl. "Jane, perhaps-

Jane was having none of it. "There is a small, filthy mattress in there, and some of the filth on it is blood!"

McGonagall stared, until finally taking out her wand and marching over to the cupboard to confirm the allegations.

Jane frowned as Petunia followed after Minerva to try and interfere. The girl was feeling anxious since she still had not seen Harry, and there was that odd tugging sensation guiding her upstairs. So, with both adults distracted, Jane made her way to the stairs. She rushed up, taking the stairs two at a time, all while ignoring Petunia's shouts for her to stop.

She ignored the bathroom and the open door to a messy boy's room with toys and trash scattered about the floor. The tugging feeling brought her to a door that was locked with several bolts and padlocks on the door. At the bottom was a cat flap that had been hastily been cut into the door. And if memory served her correctly, then this room was the one that had the bars on the window that she had seen on the outside of the house.

"No! No! No! No! No!" she whispered to herself. Using her powers, she forced open each of the locks.

The door swung open startling the occupant inside: a skinny boy with

dark unruly hair that was rushing to put a shirt on. He'd not been quick enough to hide the many scars that covered his chest and back.

"H-Harry?" she squeaked. She knew it must be him. He looked so much like his father, though his green eyes practically glowed just like Lily's. Just like baby Harry.

Harry was staring back at her now that he had his shirt on. "Who are you?"

It hurt that he didn't know who she was. It made sense that he didn't. He'd just been a toddler when she last saw him.

"What did they do to you?"

His eyes became downcast, and she could sense the shame he felt. She rushed towards him only to stop short when he cringed away.

It was too much. She fell to her knees and began to sob into her hands. James and Lily gone because of a murdering maniac. Being kept suspended in time for a decade. Being wiped from the memories of people who knew her. Her baby cousin being kept at his evil aunt's place for those missing years while being treated worse than she could ever imagine.

She didn't know how long she cried before she felt a hand on her shoulder. "Are you all right?" asked the glasses-wearing boy.

With trembling hands, she used her handkerchief to wipe the tears from her face as well as the fresh blood that had been dripping from her nose. He was totally unprepared for when she launched herself at him, enveloping him in a hug.

He froze, unsure what to do since the only other person he could remember having hugged him was his friend from school, Hermione Granger. He was more out of his element when she began to shake from sobbing. Realizing he had to do something, he began to pat her on the back. He was again startled when this seemed to make her cry even more. He was at a loss as to who she was though a part of him seemed to find her familiar.

Hearing someone approaching in the hall, he looked up wondering

how he was going to explain this to his aunt. Instead, his mouth fell open. "Professor?"

Minerva stepped into the doorway. She glanced his way, then turned to scrutinize the many locks on the door as well as the cat flap. Taking a step into the room, her sensitive nose wrinkled at the smell of the unwashed boy, as well as the filthy bird cage with his owl, Hedwig, locked inside. Her nose also informed her of the bucket in the corner of the room that the boy was evidently supposed to use to dispose of his body wastes. A glance at the window told her that this was clearly the window with the bars on it.

"The aurors will definitely be coming here," she said, making a mental note of everything for when she would give a pensive of her findings.

"No!" Petunia screeched, as she stepped in behind McGonagall. "No more freaks are coming here!" The wild-eyed woman swung a frying pan she had brought up with her at the Hogwarts teacher.

Minerva fell hard after she had been struck. Petunia had grabbed the door and slammed it shut, forcing several of the locks closed before going to the master bedroom.

"I'll have to call Vernon," the frantic woman muttered to herself. "He'll know what-

The bedroom door she had bolted exploded outwards, sending shards of wood and the pieces of the locks through the hall. Petunia had been fortunate to have been off to the side, be even so, she was covered in splinters and wood dust, as well as knocked to the floor.

Turning over, she could only stare in horror as the little girl with the glowing green eyes approached her.

oOoOoOo

Harry helped his Head of House sit up from the floor.

"Where did that bludger come from?" she muttered. "Did we win the game?"

"Professor, are you all right?"

"Hmm?" She winced as she turned her head to look at him. "Oh, Harry, there you are." She groaned and lowered her head. "Bloody hell, my noggin' is ringing. That aunt of yours, what did she hit ma with?"

"A frying pan. It can hurt like hell. I got good at ducking after the first time."

Minerva grasped his hand, and turned to look him in the eye, despite how she was feeling. "She's hit you with that thing?"

Harry tried to turn away, but she grabbed a hold of his t-shirt. He couldn't help grimacing at the situation. But it wasn't his uncle grabbing him, so he tried to relax. "It... it was when I was six or seven. I'd spilled some of the food I was cooking. I was trying to clean it, but she swung that frying pan. I was loopy for the rest of the day. Not that it mattered since they just through me in..." He tried to look away again, but she wasn't going to allow him.

"They locked you in that cupboard, didn't they?"

Harry swallowed. "So you know."

She released him but placed her hand flat against his chest. "Now I do. Why dinna you tell me, lad?"

"It never changes anything," he said flatly.

"How can you say that?"

"Do you really think I haven't tried to tell teachers when I started school. I remember Ms. Rosalyn taking me to the offices and getting the police involved. That everything would be all right and I'd never have to go through it again. And you know what, I woke up in the boot cupboard again. The next class I had she barely seemed to know who I was. My cousin, Dudley, reported that I was talking to our teacher about life here, and I was whipped and beaten when I got home. The school was told I had the chicken pox while I recovered. The next year, our teacher, Mr. Roscoe, he figured it out on his own, said he was going to do something about it. Instead, he up and moves

to Canada. There were others," he said dismissively. "They all left me to the Dursleys."

Her mouth felt dry. "But surely you could have told me once you came to Hogwarts?"

"I was building up my courage to tell you at the end of the year but then you didn't even believe me about the danger to Flamel's stone!"

She gapped for a moment. "Do you really believe I would let you be in such an obviously dangerous place like this?"

He regarded her angrily. "You put me on the Gryffindor quidditch team without even asking me. It's stupidly dangerous and extremely painful."

"But... everyone loves quidditch," she said in an attempt to defend her actions. "And your father was a star player."

"I'm not my father!" he cried out. "I was just an undersized First Year who should have been too small to play such a dangerous game."

"That... that may have been a lapse in my judgment," she reluctantly admitted, while taking a moment to reach up and touch the swelling on the side of her head.

"And then you sent us out for detention into the Forbidden Forest! Where I ran into Voldemort! We would have died if it hadn't been for one of the centaurs!"

She stared at him wide-eyed. "Harry, please believe me when I say that I have no idea what you are talking about."

She saw the anger and hurt on his face.

"This..." he pointed at her, "this is why I don't share what my life with the Dursleys is like! Whenever I do, people promise to help me. Then the next thing I know, they know nothing about it, and I am labeled an attention-seeking liar!"

Minerva was crying now. "Oh, Harry, I think someone has been using memory charms on whoever tries to help you. I just don't know who

would be such a vile thing."

"Yes, you do," said a small voice in the doorway.

Harry nearly jumped as he had forgotten about the small girl. Minerva took his hand and held him there.

"Surely not!" Minerva exclaimed in equal parts reflex and horror.

Jane raised an eyebrow. "Do you need another purging potion, Aunt Min?"

Minerva blanched in memory of the potion she had taken earlier that day. Despite a stomach settling potion, her stomach still twitched uncomfortable and her throat, urethra and colon burned slightly from the effects of the expelling of the loyalty potions she'd been under. "No, sorry. You may very well be right. It's just the very thought of it is heartbreaking to think of. Not to mention that my body is utterly repulsed by the very idea of trying a potion like that again."

"It has that manipulating coot Dumbledore written all over it," Jane went on to accuse.

"Jane," Minerva began, "that isn't a polite thing to call someone."

"It's what Lily called him," the girl declared. "She called him more colorful things when she thought I was asleep in my room."

"*Lily*?" asked Harry, his voice nearly catching in his throat.

Minerva nodded. "Jane is referring to your mother, Harry. You see, Jane is your cousin, a daughter of your father's older squib brother."

"Oh," he managed to say, very quietly as he assessed this new revelation. He managed a weak smile. "I guess that explains the wild hair."

"Hey!" Jane protested, patting her dark hair carefully.

McGonagall managed to smile. "Untamable hair is a Potter trait. Lily believed it to be a remnant of a family curse."

Jane came and sat on the floor by the two of them. "That was a joke of hers. She said it might have to do with the way high levels of magic interacts with the magical cores of Potters. She had several theories that James put into the Potter family grimoire for later generations to study. But whatever the cause, I was at least fortunate that she was able to teach me to control my hair mostly."

Harry couldn't help giving her a puzzled look. "You seem younger than me, but you say you knew my mother?"

Minerva decided to handle answering this to spare Jane. "This is going to be unexpected, Harry." She shifted her position on the floor when Jane provided a thin, ragged pillow for her to use as a cushion for her as she leaned against the bed frame. "You see, Jane has been in a type of '*time stasis*' for ten years. She was there that Halloween night when your parents were killed. For her, that night... was yesterday."

"But-" Harry began. Then found himself at a loss for words. "...so you know me?"

She sniffed and managed a weak grin. "I was there when you were born. I've even changed your nappies. I even know the reason James was never allowed to feed you large amounts of corn."

"Um..." Harry was totally confused by that.

Jane managed a weak smile. "It was right before your godfather was to visit and perform his first diaper changing procedure on you. It was a disaster and Padfoot swore he would never have kids. James laughed himself silly. Lily got revenge by making your dad change you for a week without any magical help."

"Padfoot?" Harry asked, finding that name familiar somehow.

A muffled shriek from the other room disturbed the moment.

"Um, my aunt...?"

His cousin shrugged. "I barricaded her in her closet using all the furniture in her bedroom. I told her to be quiet, too. She decided to listen to me for the most part."

"She's not harmed?" Minerva inquired.

"As tempted as I was, no." She clenched her fists. "But I swear if any of them try a hurt Harry any more, I am not going to be responsible for what I do to them."

"Restraint can be a frustrating, yet necessary, part of life," Minerva advised.

"Aunt Min, can we get him out of here already?" she asked pleadingly.

"Professor McGonagall?"

Standing in the damaged doorway was a tall black man in a neon purple business suit with a wand in his hand.

"Auror Shacklebolt. I'm surprised to see you here," Minerva responded diplomatically. "I take it that you are not here for a social call."

"No, ma'am." The tall man gave a chuckle-like grin. "The ward at this location gave off a rather intense indicator that something powerful had occurred. I came to investigate."

"As an auror or as one of Dumbledore's stooges?"

Kingsley turned to Jane with a hint of anger. He hadn't liked her tone. "I take it as a personal matter of pride to have been selected to check on Harry Potter if something happens to him. He is a hero to the British Wizarding world."

"So you are not here as an auror?" Jane demanded. "You're one of his minions that sweeps things under the carpet for him."

Kingsley raised his head as he had a hard time believing the gall of this young girl. "I am always an auror first. I may help out Dumbledore now and then, but that is out of respect."

"Kingsley," Minerva interceded. "Would you please call Amelia Bones here? There are matters to discuss with her."

At this, Kingsley looked embarrassed. "Madam, my orders were that if

the wards here ever went off, to come and assess the situation, then report back to him before anyone else."

Minerva sighed and shook her head, wincing since that made her head where she had been struck throb horribly. "That-that won't be possible right now. Dumbledore was... in an accident; he's in a magically induced coma as he heals. It is being kept quiet right now for... obvious reasons." She let him assume whatever he wanted as to what those obvious reasons were.

"When did this happen?" the auror asked in surprise.

"Earlier today."

"I see. Well, if the headmaster was unavailable, I am to report this situation to Snape." He didn't look particularly please with that, but it was understandable since Severus Snape had that effect on people.

"Severus Snape?" Jane said with disgust. "I've heard of him. He's the pervey, creepy guy that stalked Lily all through school."

Harry looked sick at hearing that. "Is that why he focuses so much attention on me?" He looked to McGonagall for help.

"I'll make sure he has less access with you," she promised.

"Snape and your dad practically had a blood feud over Lily," added Jane. "She became so mad at something Snape had said that she cursed him with greasy hair. When he was a jerk about that, she made it permanent. She also permanently gave him extreme flatulence whenever he walked around."

Harry looked at McGonagall questioningly. She cleared her throat. "Yes, well, it's not something I would normally share, but those curses are still in effect."

"I know his hair is always greasy, but the other thing..." Harry looked embarrassed. "I've never heard him break wind or... smelt it."

The professor laughed. "He has charms on his robes. It takes away the scent, as well as the sound."

"Is that why his robes give off that billowing effect when he storms about?" Kingsley asked, unable to help himself. "No one else I know has been able to get their robes to do that." He grimaced. "That would have to be some extreme farts to give that affect."

Harry shook his head. "No wonder he despises me."

Minerva put a hand on the boy's arm. "You will never be left alone with that man every again. Severus has never been able to let a grudge go." She shook her head wishing that Jane hadn't shared that secret. Severus was notorious for sifting through the minds of the students despite it being illegal. If he found out that Harry knew of the curse Lily had placed on him, he was bound to do something irrational. "None of you should mention those curses to anyone. It would just cause more trouble and raise his ire even more."

"Um, yes ma'am," Harry agreed. Jane reluctantly gave a nod. Kingsley was amused, but agreed.

"I still need to get a hold of him," Kingsley stated on a more serious note.

Minerva gave her best stern professor look that made most wilt around her. "And I am saying that I need Amelia Bones here first. Is being an auror your first responsibility or nor?" she disparaged, throwing his earlier statement back at him.

He grimaced. He had had a good look at the room, and knew why they wanted Bones. He wasn't as stupid as some of his colleagues. This treatment of Harry was unacceptable. "Problem is, I swore an oath to him."

"You swore an oath as an auror, too!" Jane barked at him, surprising him.

Minerva used the distraction to quickly draw out her wand and stun him. "Amelia's going to love this," Minerva groaned, as she examined the slumped over auror.

"Was he potioned, too?" Jane asked.

McGonagall shook her head. "Aurors are checked once or twice a

week for such things. Oaths, though, are a different matter."

"Uh," Harry looked at the both of them. "What is this about potions?"

"We'll get to that later, Harry," Minerva said. "I need to get Amelia Bones, who is the head of the aurors, to come and straighten this mess out before anyone else gets here." She closed her eyes to think.

Quick as she could, she brought out her cat patronus and verbally attached a message to it stated the address and that she needed Bones herself here personally along with only those she absolutely trusted. Also, to bring a healer that was used to working with children, especially abused children. And another healer to examine a head trauma for herself.

"That should do it," she said, putting her wand in her lap. "Now, we wait for-"

"What happened in here?" Dudley stood in the fractured doorway looking around at everything while eating a Twinkie. "Why are you in here with the freak? Are you going to take him away? I hope so. I don't like him here. And where is my mum?"

TBC

Author's NoTeS:

Since from Jane's perspective Lily and James had just died, she is going to be depressed and mourning them. She will need a little more time to show a happier disposition. It's also going to be confusing with an older Harry. I mean, come on, she used to burp him and change his diapers. And now he is a year older than her? Plus, he doesn't even know her. Things are going to be rather strange for him, too.

I may have read about Snape's flatulent billowing robes and greasy hair curse from somewhere else or it was just one of the many ideas I had percolating in my head that I no longer know if I came up with it or not.

No, Kingsley will not be evil. He just made a stupid oath to the wrong person without thinking what it all implied. Smart good people make stupid mistakes about who they trust, too.

4. Chapter 4 - Stranger Situations

Chapter 4 – Strange Situations

THE DURSLEY HOME AT NUMBER 4 PRIVET DRIVE

Amelia Bones, the head of the DMLE, had the start of a headache.

It started with a patronus call from Minerva McGonagall, her old Hogwarts teacher as well as friend. So, when Minerva informed her that one of her top aurors, Kingsley Shacklebolt was compromised by a loyalty oath to Albus Dumbledore, Amelia did the only thing she could at that moment. Which was to check the three aurors she had brought with her. It took some special wording, but the end result outed Dawlish as having given a loyalty oath to Fudge of all people. Now she would have to go through all her aurors one by one and check to see who else might be double agents. And not just her aurors, but the obliviators, the hit wizards, and even her staff as well. She didn't want to lose so many people if this turned out to be as bad as she feared. It would be devastating, especially since Fudge had put a freeze in place for her hiring any more for her department. She had been under flack ever since she refused to have anyone in her department in they bore the dark mark. Her reason for doing so was that the so-called *imperio*-ed victims of Voldemort were already compromised since they were so susceptible to the Imperious curse. She would have to work out a new oath that might free them from the loyalty oaths. She would definitely need a new one for when she was able to get new recruits again.

Currently, she was punishing Kingsley by having him deal with Vernon and his wife by keeping them in their bedroom. Dawlish hadn't got off easy as he was stuck guarding Dudley in his room.

She was sitting at the Dursley dinner table in a chair that she had transfigured to her preference. Across from her sat Minerva McGonagall, who had also transfigured her chair. Also at the table was Harry Potter and a young girl who had been identified as Jane Potter, Harry's cousin on his father's side. Harry had a large plate of food that he was sharing with his owl, Hedwig. Jane sat close to Harry as she gave Hedwig pieces of ham and turkey.

Amelia had what resembled a muggle notebook in front of her though the pages were made of parchment. She glanced over at the young boy again, grimacing. It wasn't known by many, but her monocle that she wore was an enchanted item. It allowed her to see through objects when she wished to, including clothing. The scars and bruises over his body was hideous. If she were not the head of the DMLE, she'd be tempted to go upstairs and use her wand on those two muggles.

And then there was the story of the girl Jane...

Amelia wasn't entirely sure what was going on there, and she couldn't get any answers out of Dumbledore since he was in a coma. Not that he'd give her the answers she wanted anyway. He could be more closemouthed than a clam when it came to certain subjects.

"Well, I don't see what else I can do. I shall have to call Snape since that is how Dumbledore arranged things if he was unavailable."

Jane put a protective hand onto Harry's shoulder much to his confusion and surprise. "Why?" she practically demanded. "Why are you calling that stalker?"

Jane's distrust of Dumbledore was plain to see for everyone. "Dumbledore is Harry's magical guardian, and if he is unavailable, he had it arranged that Mr. Snape would see to matters concerning Harry."

"That's simply not true, Snape was a Death Eater," Jane stated. "Sirius Black was Harry's godfather and was made his magical guardian if anything... if anything happened to James and Lily."

The two adult witches looked at the two children uneasily, as they were unsure how they were going to react. Minerva decided she would go first. "Children, I'm afraid Sirius was actually secretly a Death Eater. He's the reason Lily and James died."

"Who is Sirius Black?" Harry asked in a quiet voice.

"Sirius was James' brother in all but blood," Jane jumped in. "Sirius was kicked out of his family while going to Hogwarts and James

convinced his parents to take him in. James' mother was Dorea Black, so they had no problem taking in the son of the house of Black. Sirius thought the world of James. They were inseparable at school. They pranked everyone, sometimes even the teachers from what they told me." She glanced down as her voice caught in her throat. "He- Sirius would have died before turning on James and Lily. He loved Harry so much. He even bought him a training broom when for his first birthday. I-I remember how proud he was when he took the godfather oath for Harry. He would-"

"It was a magical oath?" Amelia interrupted, looking alarmed. Magical oaths for the position of being a godfather was rarely done anymore except by some of the older families.

"Of course, it was," exclaimed the girl. "And there was a beautiful magical aura because of it. It took over two hours to settle down. Lily said it was because of how much Sirius cared for Harry. Sirius is Harry's magical guardian, so he is the one that Harry and I need to be with."

Both adult witches' eyes met, now aware of another large wrinkle in the mess. If Sirius had taken a magical oath as godfather to Harry Potter, then there was no way he could have turned on Harry and his family. Sirius' very magic would have revolted against him.

Amelia wrote in her notebook before tearing the page out. She folded it and called over Auror Spencer, instructing him to get all the transcripts for Sirius' trial, but to tell no one why.

"Why did Sirius have a trial?" Jane demanded, her anger rising, causing one of Petunia's vases to shatter.

"Easy, child," Minerva spoke. "You are upsetting Harry."

Jane glanced at her cousin. Harry was no longer eating. Instead, he seemed frozen in place, with a bone-white grip on his fork.

Slowly, she reached over and began massaging his back, rubbing small circles just as she had done when he was a baby.

Harry swallowed a lump in his throat. "Why was he in jail? What did

he do?" he finally asked.

Amelia and Minerva exchanged glances, trying to decide who should be the one to tell the two children who had already been so wronged by life.

The professor let out a sigh. She had known the two children the longest, so it would be best that this news came from her. "He betrayed the Potters by telling You-Know-Who where they were hiding."

A snort of disdain came from Jane. "That's not possible. He couldn't have done it if he wanted to; not even under torture."

Amelia eyed the young girl. "And why do you believe that?"

"Simple. He wasn't the real secret keeper for their location."

Minerva sucked in her breath while Amelia shot up to her feet. "What do you mean Sirius Black wasn't the *real* secret keeper for the Potters? Everyone knew that he was!"

The young girl managed a tired smile. "That's just it. Everyone knew that. But James and Sirius were pranksters at heart; they loved to misdirect people. Which is why Sirius Black was only the cover for the real secret keeper."

"Stop!" Harry demanded. "Would someone please just explain what you are talking about? What is a secret keeper? I don't understand?"

Minerva went into teacher mode, quickly explaining the *fidelius* charm and the duty of a secret keeper. It was considered rare magic, not because people didn't know about it, but because of the power needed to perform the spell. The person who cast it would have been magically exhausted for days, leaving them vulnerable, which is why most people didn't dare perform it. Or at least not often.

"So," Harry began hesitantly. "If this Black wasn't my parents' secret keeper, then who was?"

"That rat Peter Pettigrew," Jane snarled. "I never felt comfortable around him. Now I know it's because he was a traitor."

The other witches contemplated this. It was a likely theory, but with one major problem. "I'm sure that if that were true, it would have come out during his trial."

"Trial?"

"Yes, all of the captured Death Eaters had trials. It was a very public event. Unfortunately, several claimed to be *imperioused*." Amelia gave a look of disgust.

"You mean they killed all those people and nothing was done to them?" Jane said in outrage. The fireplace began to collapse as if it were being torn down by some unseen force.

"Control yourself, Jane!" Minerva called out, trying to distract her.

Jane, having had her world turned upside down in such a short time, wanted to scream her outrage to the world. She had seen the affect it had on Lily and James after they heard of a Death Eater attack, then waiting to learn who had been ambushed, who had lived and who had died. Sometimes they were people that they knew. Often times it was families. The people that did such things did not deserve to be walking around free. In fact, they didn't deserve to even be alive. They called themselves Death Eaters so let them eat death.

She startled when a small hand took hold of hers. Her cousin held it and was giving her a sad look. The fireplace stopped moving only long enough for Minerva to cast a spell to repair the damage. "Maybe I should have left it," she said as an afterthought.

Before any other debates could start up, a ghostly orangutan flew into the room on an invisible vine before siding up to Amelia Bones and whispering in her ear.

Amelia was not at all surprised to see the patronus messenger. She was, however, shocked at what she was learning. "Bloody hell!" She jumped to her feet and marched around the room as the patronus made a kissing face at Minerva before fading away, startling the older witch.

"That was a message from Spencer. When he tried to get the trial

information from the ministry, the head clerk said that all information pertaining to Sirius Black was being withheld under orders of the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot Dumbledore himself. Fortunately, Spencer was able to remind the clerk that Dumbledore did not actually have the authority to withhold such material. Spencer checked to be sure, but it looked as if Black had been thrown into Azkaban without a trial. I'm also going to have the clerks checked for loyalty oaths, whenever I get time for that."

"They can't do that!" Jane shouted, jumping to her feet.

"Well, they did," Amelia said through grit teeth. She cast her patronus, a Saker falcon, and leaned in to whisper to it. A moment later, the ethereal bird flew away through the wall.

"I've just sent word to Spencer to bring Sirius Black in for '*questioning*', and to have a healer examine him so that he is healthy enough to question. That should provide me enough cover to bring him out of the clutches of the Dementors."

Jane was openly weeping now. "Poor Sirius. He was always so happy and witty. I-I can't imagine what the effect of the Dementors will have had on him."

Harry looked as if he wanted to ask a question or two, but decided against it since he wasn't sure how Jane was going to take it.

Amelia coughed slightly. "Harry," she began. "I hate to trouble you more, but I am going to need you to see one of the auror healers. I need this for evidence, so we have a case against Dumbledore. And even if he somehow manages to wiggle free from all this, it will at least ensure that you can never come here again, especially since the Dursleys will be in prison. A muggle prison, in case you are wondering, as they could not survive being that close to Dementors for long while in Azkaban."

Harry wanted to protest. He didn't want to let anyone else know about what his life with the Dursleys was like. He didn't see why they would think Dumbledore would try to grab him here, but it did seem to fit a pattern. "Fine, I guess." He glanced up at the stairs. "They can't arrest Dudley though. He's too young, even if he is a complete tosser."

He turned to the head of the DMLE with a look of resolve. "The only other family Dudley has is his Aunt Marge. He can't go there. Once Marge realizes that her brother is out of the picture, she is sure to treat Dudley worse than I was ever treated here." Harry shook his head. "There is just something really wrong with that side of the family. Well, also including my aunt. I don't know if she was always awful or if she became that way after marrying Vernon."

"Marriage is a funny thing," Minerva spoke. "It is often times like two ingredients being put onto a smoldering cauldron. Mixing them changes their properties. Sometime one ingredient will be stronger than the other, thus influencing the properties of the whole more to be like it. On some occasion, they will join and make a totally different substance. And then there are those that are like oil and water that won't mix, but stay side by side to each other."

Being almost twelve and having lived with the Dursleys, Harry only had a rough understanding of how a marriage should work. Even so, he had seen a few happy couples in the neighborhood, and he wanted to be happy like they were someday. "I think in your analogy," he paused, looking to his professor to see if he had used the correct word. She nodded, so he continued. "In this analogy, Vernon would be the stronger ingredient. But I really couldn't say since I don't know what my aunt was like before she met Vernon."

"How did you manage to stay so good in this house when they have been so horrible to you all these years?" blurted out Jane. She glanced away, embarrassed that she had said anything.

Harry didn't mind though. "I remember sitting in my cupboard one day. I might have been six or seven. Anyway, it was my second day stuck in there and I made a decision. I was going to do whatever I could to be the opposite of them. Well, within reason, but that has been kind of my inner guideline."

Amelia considered Harry's request about Dudley. It was the Boy-Who-Lived who was asking after all. Or more like the Boy-Who-Was-Betrayed-By-Those-That-He-Had-Saved. She did know some squibs in the local law enforcement. Requesting that they look into this Marge Dursley person shouldn't be much of a bother for them. If there was evidence that she would be an abuser, Dudley would not be going to

stay with her.

"Very well," Minerva spoke as she stood. "I shall take Jane and Harry to Diagon Alley. While you vet your staff, especially the healers you want to examine Harry, I shall get these two clothed properly."

"I can send an auror or two to guard you," Bones stated.

The transfiguration teacher waved the offer off. "Now, we should be fine. I will just be glad to see my young lion in proper clothing finally."

Harry's head hung a little, but he grinned over the chance to be shod of the ragged leftover clothing that had once been Dudley's. Plus, he'd be in Diagon Alley, which he always looked forward to. Pushing his plate away, Harry stood up anxious to be gone from this part of his life. He looked at the plate, feeling that he should put it away since that was one of his many duties around the house. Instead, he decided to leave it. He knew how much it would bother his aunt to see a dirty dish left on the table while she was being hauled off to jail and not be anything about it. It was petty, but he liked the idea of it.

"I think Harry is ready," Jane said, holding on to his shoulder. She was reluctant to let go of him. She knew it was irrational, but she was worried that he would disappear, and she'd never see him again.

"Um," he paused to wipe his mouth with a napkin. "What about my stuff?"

"Bring it here," McGonagall stated. "We will take it with us."

Harry grimaced. "Except for Hedwig's cage, it's all locked up out in the shed. My uncle didn't want any of it in the house."

Jane and Harry ended up going around the house to the shed in the back. Jane popped the lock with her abilities startling Harry. He wanted to ask about how she did that, but he didn't feel that now was the right time.

After carrying the luggage chest back inside, McGonagall shrank Hedwig's stand and cage before placing it inside the luggage. She checked with Harry one more time if there was anything else to put

inside the luggage. However, instead of putting anything in, Harry reached in and withdrew his wand instead, which emitted a few sparks. He also took out a small pouch which held his leftover galleons from his trip through Diagon Alley with Hagrid.

"I-I know I can't use it during the summer, but can I hold on to it for now?" he asked very quietly.

Minerva was not known to give in to sad puppy dog eyes, but on this day she decided she could give in with all that had gone on. Besides, being able to have his wand with him could help his emotional recovery if it made him feel safer. "Every well, Harry, but do not use it unless there is an emergency." She closed his luggage and shrank the entire thing until it was the size of a matchbox. Harry picked up the miniaturized luggage and inspected it before placing it in his pant pocket. "I guess I'm all packed."

APPARATION POINT IN DIAGON ALLEY

Harry got to his feet slowly. "I think I'm going to be sick."

Jane had managed to remain on her feet, but looked a bit green.

"The first time is always the worst," informed McGonagall. "Your body will adjust to apparating over time."

"Yeah," Jane said somewhat subdued. "My first time apparating, I ended up puking all over James' shoes. Sirius laughed so hard he fell over."

Hedwig gave a strangled squawk before hitting Harry in the head with her wing, followed by suddenly regurgitating all down the front of Harry's clothes.

"Oh," Minerva brought a hand to her face. "I completely forgot that owls absolutely hate apparating."

Hedwig gave another screech as she flapped up at a store awning where she continued to flap and make horrible sounds.

"Oh, yuck," Jane commented, having to turn away as the sight and smell were almost too much for her. It did prove to be too much for

Harry, and he suddenly threw up as well.

Minerva quickly cleaned up Harry with her wand, even using a breath cleaning spell for his mouth. She fumbled through one of the pockets in her robe until she found what she was looking for. "Here, Harry, take this. It's for settling stomachs. I try to keep several on hand during the summer months when I am bringing muggle-born families to Diagon Alley for the first time." She gave him a kind smile. "I remember Hermione having a similar reaction to apparating when I brought her family."

Harry's head jumped up as if he'd been shocked by electricity. "Professor, I just remembered! There's been this house-elf who's been stealing all my mail. He finally came and talked with me, saying it was going to be very dangerous for me at Hogwarts this year. He wouldn't say what family he worked for. He was going against them to warn me. I manage to get him to reveal that he'd been stealing my mail in order for me to think that my friends didn't really care for me. He seemed to think that would make me not want to go back to Hogwarts."

McGonagall grimaced. "Yes, that sounds consistent with house-elf logic. I'm just surprised that he was able to go against his family in order to warn you, or even act against you by stealing your mail." She had them all move off the apparition area as an older couple were coming to use it. "We will have to tell Amelia about that later." She could imagine some of the pure-blood families that house-elf might have come from. Amelia would have to go over every word the elf had said to try and assess the threat. It could just be angry ravings of a former Death Eater that the house-elf took to be some threat due to strike during the school year.

"Uh, professor?" Harry looked at her timidly. "Do you have a quill and parchment so I could send a quick note off? My friends haven't been able to get a hold of me all summer; I'd feel better if I could put their minds at ease some."

Hedwig squawked again from up above.

"And it would give Hedwig a chance to stretch her wings," he added. "And maybe clear her throat."

"Very well," Minerva reluctantly gave in. She was more of the mind to give the owl some distance. Owls have been known to become quite vindictive after having been apparated. A mail delivery job might give Harry's owl a chance to cool down. Minerva didn't want to have to spend the entire day looking up trying to avoid liquid projectiles. "But be quick, we need to get you clothes and then checked out by a professional healer."

Harry happily took the quill and parchment from her, and sat on the ground next to the store. Minerva decided to try get on Hedwig's good side by making a bowl of water for her. The angry owl looked like she wanted to reject the water out of sheer spite, but evidently the prospect of a cool drink for her poor throat won over. Minerva made sure to stay clear, though Jane was able to get close and pet the ruffled bird.

"There," Harry said, after a few moments. Carefully, Harry gave the message to Hedwig. "Here, take this to Hermione as quick as you can," he said, as she gently nipped at his fingers. "She'll probably want to send a message, so you can wait for her." Hedwig gave a chirp and then took off, narrowly missing a man who was walking by.

"Well, let's go," Minerva said. "You both need clothes, so this may take some time."

Jane was about to protest, but then realized she had less clothes to her name than Harry did. "So, is *Madame Sartorial's Atelier* still open for business?"

Minerva's barely suppressed a laugh. "Oh, my no. Madame Sartorial has returned to France and, sadly, taken her store with her."

Jane stuck out her bottom lip. "But I love her clothes."

Minerva found herself nodding. "Yes, well, I think you will find *Madam Malkin's Robes for all Occasions* to be up to the task of fulfilling your needs for a new wardrobe. You may even remember Matilda Malkin from when she used to work for Madame Sartorial."

"Oh, she was nice."

Harry tuned them out as they started talking about fashion and store front owners. Harry just couldn't see the appeal. But what did catch his eye was the window display in *Quality Quidditch Supplies*. He was standing there for several minutes taking in the new items when he realized that he wasn't alone in his gawking. His Head of House he knew was big into quidditch, but seeing the awe in his cousin's eyes surprised him.

"You like quidditch?"

She glanced at him. "Can a hippogriff fly?"

He grinned. "We'll have to fly together."

She laughed. "I have to warn you. I can fly loops around your father."

They both emptied of joy as soon as she said that. Her use of the present tense instead of the past tense in regards to James brought the wrongness of everything that had happened from his and Lily's murder up to this day at the forefront of their brains."

"I keep forgetting," she mumbled.

"It's, uh, it's ok." Harry ran his fingers through his untamable hair. "It just is what it is."

"But it's not right!" she exclaimed. "It's so not right!"

"Jane," Minerva spoke sharply. The transfiguration teacher held out a vial of what Jane now recognized as a calming draught. Looking around, the two kids could see the nearby window quivering, and some of the cobblestones in the road were shaking.

Instead of taking the potion, Jane drew in a breath and focused, then exhaled. She did that twice more before the episode was over.

"Sorry," Jane mentioned meekly. "I'll save the potion for when I really need it." She took and pocketed the potion. "I want to try maintain control when I can. Lily always stressed that it was important to me since my powers are very keyed into my powers."

McGonagall gave a slight nod of approval. While she did have

questions, the very public Diagon Alley was not the place to disclose any crucial data. "Very well, I think we have had enough sightseeing. *Madam Malkin's* awaits."

They moved slowly through the alley, taking in the sights. Minerva was stopped by four former students and one old classmate, but she was brief with them, promising them to be over for tea sometime soon.

"There we are," Minerva waved toward the building Harry remembered from his first time in Diagon Alley; the place he got his robes and where he met Draco Malfoy.

"Shall we go in?"

Harry heard something and looked up in the sky in surprise. "Hedwig?"

The snowy owl was flying about fifteen feet over the heads of the patrons of the alley when she dived down toward the boy.

Harry grinned and held out his arm for her to land on. He instantly compensated for the extra weight as he supported her. "Hey, girl. I thought you were going to deliver a message to Hermione for me?"

"Harry!"

Harry recognized that voice instantly, looked up with a grin spread broadly on his face, but it faltered almost instantly.

Hermione was rushing through the crowd crying almost hysterically in her need to get to her friend. She was wearing a white robe that, while looking new, had rips in places and looked like some blood on her left shoulder.

She practically tackled him with her hug, instantly crying into his shoulder. Harry looked around in alarm. No one seemed to be chasing her, but they were starting to draw a crowd.

"What is it, dear? What has happened?"

Hermione looked up, surprised to see her Head of House, but she

didn't seem to be able to talk.

"Here, drink this," Jane said, putting the calming draught in front of Hermione.

Hermione blinked at the stranger, but Minerva encourage Hermione to drink from the glass vile. She shivered from the taste even as the concoction began to settle her nerves to a more manageable level.

Minerva cast two spells in rapid succession: one to clean Hermione's face and another to silence their conversation outside the four of them.

"It all started two days ago," she began, clutching to Harry as if he were a lifejacket and she had been cast in the open seas. "My parents brought me to Diagon Alley. I thought they were taking me shopping. But, instead, they brought me to the *Solum Orphanage*."

Minerva sucked air through her teeth. She didn't like where this tale was going.

"I didn't find out that they were leaving me there until we were talking to the administrator, Madam Saeva Jackals." She was crying again. "I pleaded with my parents, but they said wanted a normal child, not a witch, and they left."

"How?" Harry couldn't understand it. How could anyone not want Hermione as their child. She was perfect. "How could they do that?"

"I don't know. I don't even know if it was really them that chose to do that."

"What do you mean, child?" McGonagall asked.

Hermione wiped away her fresh tears. "They were so distant... I don't know. After I was processed – at least that is what the administrator called it where they took all my clothes and put this outfit on me – they put me with the rest of the muggle-borns." She looked up at her professor. "The place if filled with muggle-born girls from Hogwarts and some of the minor magical schools in Great Britain. I tried counting and there was around ninety-eight of us, but I can't be sure. They've all been brought in this summer. And today, there was some

auction going on, selling us to pure-bloods. Due to everything going on, things were so tense that some of the girls had severe accidental magic going on. I was able to escape and get to the street. I'd been running for only a few minutes when Hedwig came to me." She surprised everyone by giving Harry a quick kiss to the cheek. "I came as fast as I could to find you."

"I'll protect you," Harry said solemnly. "No one will harm you. We will do everything we can to save the rest of the girls, too."

"Someone, or someones, have been rounding up muggle-born girls." Minerva McGonagall brought out her cat patronus and quickly whispered a message to it and sent it off to Madam Bones.

"Do you know what is going on?" asked Jane.

"I can't say for certain," said the older witch. "But it reminds me of something that had been done around four hundred years ago after the witch hunts, when the Wizarding world had been decimated by the high death toll. Muggle-born girls were taken to help increase the number to wizards and witches in our world. It went on for a decade before the practice was finally stopped."

"It's barbaric!" Jane shouted.

"Which is why it was forbidden to ever do again," Minerva added.

"How do we help them?" Harry asked, thinking of the other girls.

Minerva looked around. "First we have to get Hermione to safety. There may have been a contract made, and we need to hide her before someone can get close enough to activate it on her."

As if on cue, Harry spotted someone shoving through the far end of the alley. A tall man with long, slicked back hair, and at his side, Harry's nemesis, Draco Malfoy, who was pointing wildly in their direction.

"Professor!" Harry pointed.

Minerva cursed in Gaelic. "Get to Gringotts! Quickly! Get to someplace that they cannot get within ten feet of you. I'll delay

them."

The three children took off running.

AuThOr'S NoTeS:

Time for explanations. This is going to be more alternate universe than normal. I still am going to have many of the things from 'The Chamber of Secrets' happen, but I am adding things.

No, there will not be any sex scenes. The girls won't be stuck in bondage. Things like that just make me very angry. Especially since it is still somehow happening in this day and age. And not just in third world countries.

I have plans for a big blow out in the Wizengamot.

Also, big plans for Jane and the Unspeakables. But that may not be in the next chapter. I just wanted people to know Jane has some big parts coming up, too.

I just want to say, in case some have not guessed, that with that many parents giving their children away suddenly like Hermione's parents did, the Imperius Curse had to have been involved. I don't want people mad at me thinking I had Hermione's parents be so horrible when they obviously weren't.

I want to say more, but it would give too much away.

Also, I just want to recommend my first Harry Potter story to everyone, 'The Day the Dursleys Came to Hogwarts', where I had tried hard to add as many new concepts as I could into a Harry Potter story since so many seem to be running on similar formulas. Most people seemed to really enjoy it. I hope for those that choose to read it, enjoy it to.

5. Chapter 5 - Stranger Relationships

Chapter 5 – Strange Relationships

The three children took off running. Hedwig took to the air, and somehow knowing that the approaching Malfoys meant her charge harm, she divebombed them, letting loose liquid discharges to the side of the senior Malfoys head. Then, flew away over the rooftops before she could be fired upon by the man's wand.

Harry, Jane and a terrified Hermione weaved and pushed their way past the patrons of the Diagon Alley until they could run up the stone stairs of Gringotts.

Hermione stopped in front of the guards, pulling Harry to a stop. "Sir, where can we go in Gringotts where we can be away from anyone else for a while? Some place no one can intrude upon us."

The two guards snorted in disinterest and looked away, bored.

Jane turned to Harry. "You took a pouch of coins out of your luggage; can I see it?"

Harry, without hesitation, took the pouch of coins out of his pocket and handed it to her. Jane removed six galleons out to the guards. "Well, we need an answer fast, or I just go in and ask a different Goblin?"

"Try your vault. House Potter should have a big enough one," one of the Goblins quickly answered, even as he snatched up the coins before his companion could. Yes, the Goblins could all recognize the more famous and/or rich clients they had, as it was good business sense to do so.

"I can see the Malfoys!" Hermione pointed down the street where the blond father and son had just come around the corner.

Jane took out ten more coins. "I've heard plenty about the Malfoys for Lily and James. Like how the Malfoys consider Goblins to just be filthy creatures that should be used in hunting for sport. Lucius

Malfoy's father actually tried getting that considered by the Wizengamot." She tossed the coins carefully in her hands, before speaking to the two Goblins. "I know you can't stop the Malfoys from coming after us, but you could check them for weapons. I happen to know for a fact that he has one hidden in his walking stick."

"All we would be doing is our jobs," responded one of the guards.

"Exactly," she said, handing the Goblin the coins, before rushing inside.

"We got to get into the line going to the vaults," Harry said, leading the way. "What weapon does Malfoy Senior have in his walking stick?"

Jane smirked. "One that he isn't going to want the Goblins handling; his walking stick holsters his wand."

They rushed to the head of the line, stopping next to a small woman in a worn robe with a small child next to her. "Pardon, ma'am, I really am sorry, but this is an emergency." He reached back to take his coin pouch from his cousin. "If you would be so kind to let us take your place, you can have all the coins left in my coin pouch."

The woman had balked at this sudden interruption to her day, and it already a sad and depressing day for the woman. She glanced at the pouch and then back at Harry. "How-how much?"

"Uh, I'm not sure." He opened it as wide as he could to show the galleons inside without letting any fall out. "Maybe sixty or more."

The pouch of galleons was snatched out of his hands faster that the seeker player could spot, and then he was tackled into an embrace as fast as a Hermione-missile hug. "You've saved us! You've saved us!"

He managed to pull himself from the woman after a few tries to see Jane arguing with Griphook, who Harry recognized from his first venture down to his vault.

"Just let me do the stupid blood test!" Jane snapped. "I know that can get us into our vaults if we don't have our key!"

Griphook grumbled something about pesky wizards and witches and their inability to bring their vault keys with them. Snatching a parchment over from a nearby counter, he laid it out along with a blade. Jane slashed the palm of her hand and slammed her hand flat on the paper. Counting to ten, she pulled her hand up, revealing no wound or blood on her hand. The paper, however, displayed her particular information.

"There, now get us to the Potter vault that holds the relics."

"There's more than one vault?" Harry found himself asking.

Shouting from the entrance drew their attention again. Malfoy senior was screaming in outrage as the guards were trying to examine his walking stick.

"We have to go now!" Harry and the two girls leapt up into the cart, surprising Griphook. Grunting, the Goblin got in and released the brake of the cart so they could begin their descent.

Behind them, they could hear a child shout that they had just seen Harry Potter. Further away was the distinctive whiney shouting of Draco Malfoy.

Harry shouted in joy as the cart zipped down the tracks at an insane speed. Hermione grabbed onto him tight with both arms as she had never had to go down into the tunnels before since her parents were able to exchange British muggle currency for galleons topside in the bank proper. Jane would have joined in with Harry in the exuberant screams, but she was still feeling rather melancholy over everything. It did do her heart good to see Harry happy. She still couldn't believe that Harry had been shunted off to the Dursleys to live.

The cart came to an end at Vault #1181, which was not the vault Harry had gone to before when he was with Hagrid. Jane hopped out, beating an annoyed Griphook. She held out her hand to Griphook. The Goblin handed her his blade. She slashed the palm of her hand again and slammed it hard against the middle of the vault door. With her free hand, she handed Griphook his knife again which he resheathed, not having to clean the blade since it had already absorbed the blood on it.

After a few seconds, the vault began to crack open, shaking off dirt and grime that had built up over the entrance from the lack of being used. Torches inside flared to life, the light bouncing off shiny surfaces to refract more light around. Jane nodded to Harry as she brushed off her hand which had been healed.

Harry had to help a woozy Hermione out of the cart, much to the amusement of the Goblin. Hermione was even having problems walking now that she had solid earth under her. "Why? Why would they use such an insane means of conveyance? Surely the Goblins could make an elevator or even a private floo system for the bank, right?"

"And where would the fun in that be?" griped Griphook.

Harry spared Griphook a silent grin showing that he preferred the mining cart ride over the other suggestions.

Once inside, they looked around at what appeared to be a huge storeroom. "What is all this?" Harry asked, his voice sharing his awe.

"Humph." Griphook was studying the room that had been closed for so long. "This is where the Potter family keeps many of its relics. It became much more crowded when the Potter house-elves suddenly moved everything here from the family estate, Pottermoor. It was under attack by Voldemort and his underlings. When Voldemort used *Fiendfire*, the house-elves brought everything they could here that they could save."

"I know this story," Jane said. "I can tell you later. Let's put some distance from the entrance and see what we can figure out about this situation Hermione is in. Griphook, would you please join us? We may have some business for you and for Gringotts."

Going in deeper through narrow aisles, passing piles of galleons in some areas along with gold cups and vases, and some bookcases filled with old tomes that they had to steer Hermione away from, they finally came upon a large ornate wooden dining table with chairs stacked on it. Harry brought one down and had Hermione sit. Her color was coming back, but she was still swaying some. Soon they had chairs down for everyone and Jane brought Griphook up to

speed as to why they had come rushing into the bank.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Harry.

"Hmm?" The Goblin glanced at him disinterestedly. "I don't have to share my opinions with you?"

Jane stood up. "Just a moment." She jogged back a ways, using a large crystal pitcher with a gold covered handle that was bejeweled with diamonds, she carefully filled it with galleons. It was quite heavy, and Harry rushed over to help her get it to the table.

Letting out a sigh from the exertion, Jane took a galleon out of the top of the pitcher and tossed it over to Griphook who was eyeing the pitcher greedily. "Do you think you might express your opinion now?"

Griphook rubbed the coin before pocketing it. "It sounds like the actions of one of the Wizengamot committees."

"Explain, please," Jane asked, tossing Griphook another coin that the Goblin easily caught.

"Every now and then, one of the committees gets filled with just one type, either blood-purist, or light-minded fools. Since they all agree on whatever it is they are working on, they sometimes decide just to implement it instead of bringing it before the rest of the Wizengamot."

"That's got to be illegal!" Hermione stood, shouting. "They can't just take muggle-borns from their parents and-and sell them like cattle!"

Harry wasn't sure how it had happened, but he was by her side and holding her as she began to cry again.

Jane tossed a coin to Griphook. "How do you think they expect to get away with it?"

Griphook studied the coin, thinking about his answer. "The system is corrupt, but not to that degree. Many of the pure-bloods consider muggle little better than cattle. They probably think that if they get it all done with contracts magically bound before there is an uproar, no

one will be able to stop it." He shrugged. "They'll pay some fines while proclaiming to have done it with the best of intentions. They everyone will try to forget it."

"But all of us muggle-born girls will be enslaved!" Hermione cried out.

The Goblin flipped the coin so that it landed in his pocket only to have another tossed to him from Jane. He admired how she thought. Someone had taught her that information costs, so be ready to pay it. "They will all probably be made into concubines. Or baby factories for sterile couples. A few might even be child brides."

"We have to do something," Harry stated, as he held his bereaved friend.

Jane nodded. She tried to think how James and Lily would handle this. "Ok, I have a thought." She turned to Griphook. "I need a message to get to Amelia Bones immediately."

Griphook nodded. "It could be done... for a price."

She tossed out ten galleons in rapid succession. He caught them all and grinned.

Jane saw some parchment on a desk nearby. "Ok, I have to get this all down. Give me a few minutes." She went over to the desk and began to write.

"Who is she?"

Harry glanced at Hermione. In the whirlwind of events, he had not introduced her to Jane. "Oh, uh, it turns out she is my long-lost cousin. I-I just met her today."

The muggle-born stared over at Jane. "She kind of looks like you. Is she from your father's side of the family? Where has she been this whole time? Why haven't you met her before now?"

Harry ran his fingers through his hair. "It's... complicated. Evidently my dad had an older squib brother who had run off to the Colonies in the Americas. He had a child before he died, but it sounds like he

didn't know she existed. Somehow Dumbledore rescued her from some muggle experimentation facility and brought her to life with my folks before I was even born."

Hermione interrupted. "But she looks older than you!"

"Yeah, I know." He glanced over to his cousin who was still writing. "She was there the night Voldemort came and killed my folks."

Hermione instantly had him in a tight embrace.

He still wasn't used to hugs, though he did like it when she did that. "There's more."

She tentatively released him.

"After Voldemort was destroyed, Dumbledore took Jane to Hogwarts. For reasons we don't fully understand, he put Jane in a magical stasis for ten years. It's like suspended animation in sci-fi stories and movies."

Hermione's mind whirled with the new concepts. "I didn't even know that people could be kept in stasis. Why would he do that?"

Harry wasn't really comfortable talking about it yet, but it was Hermione, so he would try. "He wanted to keep her from me. I don't know why. But, evidently, he had let Jane be examined by the Unspeakables. Do you know of the Unspeakables?" She nodded, so he continued. "They wanted to study her longer, but whatever exams they had originally done to her really freaked her out. My dad made Dumbledore make a magical oath that said he wouldn't let her be away from her family for more than a day."

"Oh, so that is why he had her in a stasis, so that a day wouldn't pass for her." Now, she frowned. "But, that still doesn't explain why you two couldn't have grown up together. Did the headmaster give any explanation?"

Harry shook his head. "He couldn't. Jane was just waking up when she saw Dumbledore standing over her as he was about to *obliviate* her. Her magic lashed out at him, sending him from one side of the Hospital Wing to the other. He had broken several bones and I don't

know what all, but they did one of those medically induced coma so his body can heal without him experiencing a lot of the trauma."

She was looking at her feet now. "I know I don't really know the headmaster except for a lot of what I have read, but it sounds like he is a bit manipulative."

Harry nodded. "Yeah, we found out a few other things earlier today, too." He went on to tell her about the loyalty potion in McGonagall and the discovery of the loyalty oath in at least one of the aurors. She just sat there stunned, as if another big part of her established safe world came crashing down.

A noise at the front of the vault caught Harry's attention. Leaving Hermione, telling her to stay and that he would be right back, Harry went with Griphook back to the entrance of the vault. Looking back toward where his cousin sat, Harry thought he should be prepared to follow her example, if it became necessary, and went to one of the piles of galleons nearby and stuffed a few handfuls into his pockets.

When they got there, standing on the other side of the vault entrance was Draco Malfoy, grinning evilly, and the much taller look-alike next to him was either his father or a close relative. Behind them stood two Goblins who managed to look both annoyed with the two wizards and amused with them at the same time.

"You have something of mine, boy," said the man.

"Nothing in here belongs to you," Harry said coldly.

"Don't talk that way to my father, scarhead!" Draco barked.

"Now, Draco," said his father, "let us try and be reasonable." He had a look of amusement when speaking to his son, yet when he looked on Harry it was cold and deadly. "The girl known as Hermione Granger is now under my care. I will be seeing to her wellbeing. Bring her to me now or I will have you before the Wizengamot, boy."

Harry turned his back to the Malfoys, to Griphook who was standing almost behind him. "What do you say about that, Griphook?" Harry discreetly held out a galleon to him.

Griphook accepted the coin and pocketed it. "Let me see the paperwork, and then I can tell you."

"You doubt me word?" Draco's father exclaimed incredulously, wanting to curse this beast mercilessly, but not daring to do so while in the bank.

"I merely requested to examine the paperwork you would need to proclaim guardianship over Miss Granger, wizard," said the Goblin with a low growl.

"Who are you anyway?" demanded Harry.

"I am Lucius Malfoy!" surprised that the boy did not know his name.

"Do you have the parchment with you or not?" Griphook sounded both annoyed and bored. The two Goblins standing behind the Malfoys were having to hide their amusement, but they did nod their approval at riling up the conceited wizard and his puny brat of a son.

Muttering to himself, Lucius held up the contract for the Goblin to read, but did not hand it to him. He did not realize that Goblins had excellent eyesight.

"This is not valid," answered with a toothy smirk, as he turned his back to the Malfoys. Harry happily handed Griphook of galleons without even counting them.

"What do you mean not valid?" demanded Draco. "That uppity mud-blood is ours!"

Lucius rapped the top of Draco's head with his walking stick.

"That is a contract of guardianship. For it to be activated, Mr. Malfoy had to bring it within ten feet of Miss Granger and say the activation word. Only then will she be his '*subject*'."

"I demand you bring her here!" Lucius was becoming very angry at this point. Draco was trying to emulate his father with pitiful effect.

"Not very likely." Harry turned his attention to the Goblin. "How long can we stay inside my vault?"

"Until closing at 6 P.M." answered the Goblin, taking another galleon for his trouble.

"And we will be waiting right here," smirked Lucius. "You might as well come out here now, boy."

Harry spared them an annoyed look. "They can't come in here, yeah?"

"Nope. Even the Malfoys respect and fear the repercussions of such a deed as going into someone else's vault uninvited. But they will have to pay a large sum to Gringotts to just park themselves outside a vault, impeding traffic."

"I hope it's a big sum."

"Oh, it is," Griphook grinned. The two Goblins behind the Malfoys did, too.

"You're going to lose," teased Draco.

"Put a sock in it, dung-for-brains." Harry gave the Goblin his attention again. "With this contract, how all can that affect Hermione?" Harry gave him three more coins.

"I've already told you some. She could be made to be a concubine, made a bride, or even a baby-factory for a sterile couple. It's rumored that Draco Malfoy was the product of such a union, and then blood adopted by Lucius' wife, Narcissa, once he was born."

"That-that's a lie!" Draco shouted, launching himself forward, only to bounce off the wards on the entrance to the vault.

Harry stared for a minute at the whiny blond brat on the stone floor. "What would have happened to his birth mother if that were true?" He almost forgot to hand over a galleon for that question.

The Goblin shrugged. "She would no longer be necessary since most pure-bloods only have one heir. (Which is a highly stupid concept, in my opinion.) So, she would have been gotten rid of."

Harry blinked. "Wait, gotten rid of how?" He handed over another galleon, suddenly realizing why Jane had gathered so many of the

coins together when they first started asking questions.

The Goblin shrugged. "There are too many ways for that to be answered properly. She could be dead, having served her purpose. Or obliterated of the duty she had performed to the Malfoys. Or maybe she was just set free. Or kept as a secret concubine or given to someone else to be their concubine or baby-factory. There are numerous possibilities."

Harry glanced back. Lucius was seething at them. Draco had just gotten to his feet and was eyeing his father, as if seeing him for the first time. Harry could see the question in Draco's eyes, but also knew he didn't dare ask about it.

"But, back to your friend Hermione," said Griphook. "She could also be adopted into the Malfoy family. Possibly even blood-adopted so that she would actually be considered family."

"Never!" shouted Draco, who snapped out of his momentary funk. "That brainy, bushy-haired, buck-toothed mud-blood would never be a Malfoy!"

Harry snuck another coin to Griphook. "Of course, Hermione could actually have been a product of one of Lucius' affairs, whether romantic or as a result of one of the Death Eater rape attacks on muggles. The guardianship could be his attempt to bring his daughter into his family."

A look at Lucius' anger and disgust made it clear that this last possibility was not very likely.

Before they could continue, a small metal ball flew out of the vault and up through the tunnels.

"What was that?" demanded Lucius.

"How would I know?" Harry snarked. "I was standing here with you when it happened."

Harry turned and walked back into the deeper aspects of his family vault with Griphook behind him, ignoring the shouts of the Malfoys. Once they were out of sight, Harry handed four more coins to the

Goblin. "What was that thing?"

"A messenger ball," the Goblin answered, happily putting his new galleons away.

"Right, that must be Jane's doing."

Hermione was pacing when they found her.

"Hermione?"

"I-I followed you," she said. "I didn't come close, but I heard what Malfoy Senior said."

Harry found himself engulfed by a Hermione missile. He had to turn his head some to get free of her hair, but he didn't mind. "We will find a way to save you." He was regretting that she may have heard some of what Griphook speculated about herself.

"It's almost five o'clock now," Hermione went on "Jane just sent a messenger ball to Madam Bones, but she is busy trying to find out which of her aurors have made loyalty oaths and to who they made them. I heard Griphook say we had to leave here at six!"

"Where is Jane?" He glanced around, but his cousin was nowhere.

"She said she had to find something. She went deeper into the vault." Hermione was starting to cry again. "I just can't go to the Malfoys. Some of the kids at Hogwarts have said that he is much worse than Draco."

She needed a solution, Harry realized. And she needed it sooner than later or she was going to work herself up into a frenzy. He glanced around trying to spot anything inside that might help them.

He saw Griphook.

Harry flipped a galleon in the air to the Goblin who caught it with such speed and ease that it impressed the Quidditch seeker.

"Griphook, is there another way that we can escape here without the Malfoys activating that contract?" He tossed another gold coin.

The Goblin frown before shaking his head. "We Goblins made sure there could only be one way in or out of each vault."

"We are going to lose," Hermione said, as she fell into a chair, feeling defeated.

Harry frowned. There was just no way he was going to let Hermione be subjected to the Malfoys.

Resolving himself, Harry went over to the large crystal pitcher that Jane had filled with galleons. Lifting it, took nearly all his might, but he managed to carry it over to the cautious Goblin.

"Here. This is all yours, including the pitcher, if you can find a way to free Hermione of this contract."

Griphook licked his lips and his eyes gleamed with greed. "I can't kill them, Lord Potter. I can only do that if they steal from Gringotts or attack myself or another Goblin. It would be bad business for the bank otherwise."

Harry jerked back in surprise. He hadn't expected that the Goblin would think he was trying to hire him as an assassin. "I wasn't asking you to kill them."

"Just checking the parameters of what you want me to do," the Goblin said easily.

"I want Hermione free and safe from that contract," Harry stated again. "And you have to come up with something we can use before six."

Griphook looked around calculating what he could do, while fingering some of the galleons in the top of the pitcher. "I need to look at some of your family's personal effects, papers and things."

"Do it then," Harry told him.

The desk that Jane had used earlier seemed to hold many of the things the Goblin had mentioned so he started there.

Harry and Hermione watched as Griphook looked through things

with a speed that surprised them both. Hermione wanted to ask the Goblin about some of the things, but was afraid to deviate him from his task since it was her life on the line.

"Should we get Jane?" Harry asked.

Hermione looked out into the cavernous vault. It was filled with furniture, boxes, bookshelves, urns, trinkets and various piles of galleons. There were paths cleared through it, but things were piled so high in areas that you could not see over them. There was a genuine fear that a person could get lost. "Let's just wait here. Griphook might need us."

As they waited, Hermione told him more about who she had seen at the *Solum Orphanage*. "Penelope Clearwater was in my group. She's a Ravenclaw prefect, or was going to be before all this. Sophie Roper was another Ravenclaw. Sally-Anne Perks was the only other Gryffindor in our year. There were several older ones, but I didn't know their names. There were two Hufflepuffs in our year, Lisa Turpin and Sally Smith. If there were others of our year, I didn't see them." See looked down, feeling guilty. "I wasn't very social at Hogwarts. There were so many faces there, and I can't even put a name to most of them."

Harry lowered his head, too. "We will do everything we can to help them, too."

They sat there for a while, side by side, leaning against each other.

"Found a solution," Griphook said, with a toothy grin. "One I think you will be happy with, too."

"Great!" Harry said, jumping up in excitement. "What is it?"

"It's quite simple really." The Goblin was back at looking over the pitcher sitting on the stone floor that was almost two-thirds his height, filled with galleons. Today would be the most profitable day he had ever had.

"What is it?" Harry asked again.

The Goblin chuckled. "It's one your parents used, back when she was

getting lots of flack at Hogwarts for being a muggle-born who was so much more brilliant than the majority of pure-bloods."

"Yeah?" He was really interested now. His knowledge of his parents was like a barren desert with only a few oases.

Griphook held up a ring. "This ring that your mother wore at school marked her as under the protection of House Potter. The pure-blood scum didn't dare even insult her when she had this. Other pure-bloods wouldn't have been able to enforce a contract on her either."

"That's great, right?" He turned to Hermione who looked concerned. He thought about it, and there was something that troubled him, too.

"Ah, Griphook, people have mentioned this a few times today; what exactly does the term House Potter mean?"

Griphook waited, and Harry finally caught on. He tossed him the last two coins that were in his pockets.

Griphook grinned merrily as he palmed the two fresh galleons. "It means you really need to put this on, Lord Potter." He tossed Harry a different ring.

Harry easily caught it easily with his seeker reflexes. It looked to be made of gold and embossed on the top with a roaring griffin with small diamonds for teeth and a large ruby in its mouth. "I don't understand."

Griphook gave an exaggerated sigh. "How do you wizards every survive without us Goblins explaining everything to you? Wizards and witches are so illogical you can't even keep track of your own money; you have to have us do it for you. You are the last of the Potters. You are over eleven. You are now considered the head of your house. You just have to put on that ring to make it official. And you have to do that part before you can do the part that will save your friend from the clutches of the Malfoys."

The boy gave a small 'Oh', and wondered what else he had not been informed about. Why had none of his teachers said anything about his lordship or House Potter? And then it hit him. Dumbledore. Now

he had to wonder how many of the other teachers were under loyalty potions or oaths. How many other things had been kept from him or covered up?

The ring felt heavy in his hand. He could almost see the griffin moving. With a heavy sigh, he put it on. Family magics coursed through his body, making him shiver as it spread up his arm. When it got to his forehead, he was suddenly overcome with pain as he threw himself down onto the stone floor. His head pulsed as he felt an unbelievable pressure building. Suddenly, his forehead seemed to burst, and Harry thought he was about to die. He could hear Hermione calling for him from somewhere far away, and he blinked. The pain was gone.

"That was bloody horrible."

"Harry, language," Hermione said automatically. "But, yes, it was bloody horrible. Don't you ever do that to me again."

He became aware that his head was in her lap. She was sitting on the floor, wiping some black goop from his forehead. "What is that?" he asked.

"It came from your scar."

"Here," Griphook had a small cylinder container open for her. "Put that cloth in here, Miss Granger. Gringotts can examine it for you... for a price, of course."

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "I want to know what that was. And why did putting my ring make that happen."

"The family magic in your ring must have expelled whatever that was in your scar," Hermione summed up, looking to Griphook for confirmation. The Goblin shrugged, not wanting to commit an answer without an exam.

"Now, Lord Potter." The Goblin held out a smaller ring in his hand; it was the first one he had showed them. It was smaller and thinner. This ring had the side view of a prancing griffin in which the image was coated in diamonds.

Harry looked up nervously. "Are you sure my parents did this?"

"Definitely," stated the Goblin. "It's all recorded over at the desk in the open documents."

"What are '*open documents*'?" Hermione asked. Despite the circumstances, she really couldn't help asking questions.

Griphook shook his head. "I will answer this one for free since I feel partially responsible for the event Lord Potter went through. That, and the fact that it really is something simple. Open documents are just that: documents left out in the open for anyone to discover. It will be things like wills or diaries for the descendants to find easily. That said, not everything is going to be left out in the open. Not even in a vault. Some things are secret or just too personal to share even after you are dead."

"Oh," Hermione said. "Uh, thank you, Griphook."

Harry was fumbling with the ring? "If this will protect you, Hermione, we should get it on you before the bank closes."

Hermione held out her hand before tentatively pulling it back. "Maybe we should check for something else. Just in case."

"Why? We really don't have time." Harry saw her fidget which she only did when she was really nervous. "Do you think it will hurt you like my family ring did to me? Griphook said that was unexpected. This shouldn't hurt you."

"But, Harry, what if...?" She blushed and turned her head away.

"What if what?" he asked, confused.

She was not meeting his eye. "I'm afraid to say. If I am wrong, you will think I am being silly; if I am right... then I am probably lost to the Malfoys."

"What? No, I will always be there to help you, Hermione. You're my best friend."

She looked up at him in surprise. "I thought Ron was your best

friend."

Harry grimaced a bit. "Ron... he's the first friend I've had my age. But, that said, he can be very thoughtless and rude. He's also rather lazy except when he eats. He procrastinates and is always complaining about other people. And worst of all is his jealousy. He whines if you don't play chess with him and he goes on and on about quidditch. He just makes it difficult to be his friend sometimes, you know?"

"Then why do you put up with him?" she asked in surprise.

"I-I don't have many friends. Hagrid is actually my first friend. I met him when he delivered my Hogwarts letter on my birthday."

"You were eleven when you got your first friend?"

Harry knew she wasn't going to let this go. "My cousin Dudley is my age. We were in the same classes. He's a whale-sized brute who is quite proud of that. Anyone that looked like they might befriend me were bullied horribly until they didn't dare go near me."

"That's why friends are so important to you?" Tears were starting to build up in her eyes. "I didn't know."

He shrugged and took her hand, lining up the ring for her finger. "One of the things I've been thinking about the last couple weeks was that thing you said before I went on alone to face Voldemort. The things that were more important... you know."

She blushed as he placed the ring on her finger. There was a soft glow around the ring. It slowly rose up through her body. Then faded.

"That... that was nice," she said, her voice filled with awe. "It was... inviting."

Harry grinned. "Yeah, I felt it, too. What does it mean, I wonder?"

Griphook chuckled as he clutched the galleon filled pitcher tightly in one of his claws. "Let me be the first to congratulate the two of you on your betrothal!"

Hermione gaped, unable to say anything.

"What?!" Harry exclaimed, totally floored.

"Oh," Hermione manage to say. "It really does mean that." And she fainted.

TBC

AuThOr'S NoTeS:

Well, I hope that is a nice surprise cliffhanger. And not to ruin any surprises, there won't be any weddings until they graduate.

Hopefully this chapter was interesting enough for everyone. I tried to make it as unique as I could.

Next chapter, they will have to confront the Malfoys.

6. Chapter 6 - Stranger Resolutions

Chapter 6 – Strange Resolutions

Harry frantically held Hermione. His reflexes were quick enough that he had caught her and eased her to the ground. Now he was stuck cradling her head to his chest.

"What do I do?"

Griphook's eyes rolled in exasperation at the perplexed teen. "You could always try kissing her."

Harry glanced down at the side view of her face and could just make out her lips. Nope, he may have been brave enough to go after the Philosopher's Stone, but he was not about to sneak a kiss on Hermione when she was out like a light. It just wouldn't be right. Still, that is something mentioned in numerous fairy tales about kisses needed to wake people up. Would that apply in this situation?

"Um, Griphook, is-is that what my parents did? I mean, did my mom go into some kind of coma when she got her ring? And my dad had to, uh, kiss her to wake her?"

"Why are you talking about kissing?" Hermione said, looking around in confusion as she sat up.

"No reason!" Relieved, and maybe just a bit disappointed, Harry helped her up carefully. Griphook chortled as he made a rough estimate in how many galleons he had earned. He was already mentally making plans to take the antique crystal pitcher to be evaluated by a cousin of his who works with such items.

"I'm not going to break," she commented to his odd behavior. "Why was I on the-?" She gasped as she noticed the ring on her finger. A golden Potter betrothal ring, according to Griphook. "And I might need to sit down again."

Harry eased her into one of the antique wooden chairs.

"Harry?" She looked at him wide-eyed, seeing the same fear in his

eyes that gripped her.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I didn't know... I..." With puppy dog eyes, he looked up at her. "You don't hate me, do you?"

She couldn't help the outburst of laughter. "No. No, Harry, I don't hate you. I doubt I ever could." Glancing down at her ring again sobered her quickly. "We need to find any and all details regarding Potter betrothals. I've heard Lavender say that every major Wizarding family has different rules and requirements. At least those families that still use betrothal rings."

Harry blinked. "You learned something from Lavender? It must be a sign of the end times."

That brought another smile to Hermione's face. "Yes, well, she isn't just a gossip queen. The things she takes interest in just rarely interest me. Especially in that '*Witch Weekly*' rag."

Harry nodded in understanding. '*Witch Weekly*' published all too much rubbish about him, and all without even a single interview. Not that he would ever give them an interview. The way some of the girls looked at him as they pass in the corridors way embarrassing, bordering on disturbing.

She reached out and took his hand. The hand that had his Head of House ring. She scrutinized the griffin head on the ring, only to jerk back suddenly.

"It moves! I'm sure it must have moved."

Harry looked at his ring. "I thought so, too, earlier. But, it doesn't seem to be doing anything right now."

She frowned as she bit her lip. "We have to find out what these rings do, Harry."

"I might have the answers to everything!" came a voice from deeper in the vault. Jane walked out from a path that led between the piles of furniture and various objects. Behind her, floating in the air as it trailed after her were two long flat boards of some kind. "Sorry for taking so long. I had to discuss a few things."

"Jane!" Harry exclaimed, happy to see his long-lost cousin. "We managed to... Wait, who were you discussing things with down here?"

Jane whipped her nose of blood a final time after using her abilities to swing the boards up into a more vertical position, showing it to be two large portraits.

"Mum. Dad." Harry instantly knew the two occupants in the portrait on the right. The other two were an older couple that Harry was rather sure he was related to as well due to the man's hair and maybe the lady's nose.

"I see you get top billing," Harry's dad teasingly complained to Lily.

"After two and a half days of labor, I better get top billing," Lily retorted.

"You found their portraits," Hermione surmised. "That's what you went looking for."

Jane was grinning from ear-to-ear, though it was quite evident that she had been crying recently. "I figured if anyone would be able to help keep Hermione out of the hands of the Malfoys, it is them. Plus, I really did need to talk to them." She looked at the portraits with a terrible longing for her family that had, for her, so recently torn away by a psychotic megalomaniac. Her stasis internment by Dumbledore made her feel even more vulnerable. She wanted little baby Harry to hold and comfort, but now there was an older version in him. Slightly older than her, but he was her size now due to being starved by his aunt and uncle. It was hard to not just hold him in a protective bubble. If they had the option of staying down here in their vault, she would insist on it if it would keep those who wanted to hurt them at bay.

Harry was caught flat-footed. He tried to say something, but nothing came out. Instead, he walked over to the portrait of his parents that was now leaning against a bookcase, and placed his palm against it. His father did likewise, Lily reaching out to put her hand over that of her husband.

"I've... I've missed you," he finally managed to say.

Lily was crying now, and Harry was trying not to. Hermione came up behind him and he immediately pulled her into a hug because he really needed one right that moment, and his parents couldn't give him one.

A gong sounded, sending reverberations throughout the vault.

"Thirty minutes to closing," announced Griphook. "It'll take up five minutes to get up to the main lobby and you lot out the door if we hurry. Still that Malfoy bunch in front of your vault door to deal with, too."

"We still need to find a way to keep Hermione from being claimed by the Malfoys," Jane pointed out urgently.

"We-uh," began Harry. "That is, Griphook here, I hired him. He managed to put together a plan, and..."

Lily had been studying the girl that her son had seemed so close to. "Is that... she's wearing my betrothal ring!"

Hermione seemed to wilt, unable to look up at the portraits as they began to speak in hushed tones.

"Um." Unsure what to say, Harry went over to Hermione and took her hand. "The, uh, the ring is the plan that Griphook came up with. I mean, Griphook came up with the idea that the ring-"

"The Potter Betrothal ring," said the man in the other portrait.

"Uh, yeah, the-the Potter Betrothal ring, that it would cancel out what the Malfoys were trying to do to gain control over Hermione."

His mother shook her head in dismay. "Did he even explain what it meant to put it on someone?"

"Uh," Harry's head hung low. "He may have skipped that part."

"Griphook! Explain yourself!" Lily demanded.

The Goblin remained examining all the coins he'd earned within the last hour.

"Lily," James interrupted. "You forget, Goblins detest portraits and other animated objects that have their own control. They refuse to even acknowledge them, except as objects. It's a taboo of theirs."

"Please, don't blame Griphook for this." Harry looked the paintings of his parents in the eye. This was the closest he was going to get to ever knowing his parents. He didn't want to possibly cause them to reject him. "He was just doing what I paid him to do."

"Is that my great-grandmother's crystal Grecian water pitcher?" asked the woman in the other portrait. "You paid a Goblin my great-grandmother's crystal Grecian water pitcher? And... and it's filled with galleons! It was a wedding gift from Louis the 14th! It's exceptionally rare! Are you insane? Why in Merlin's name would you do that?"

"I'm sorry," Harry managed to say, trying to look the woman in the eyes but having some difficulty. "But if it saved Hermione from whatever the Malfoys have planned for her, then it is more than worth it. I'd have given away a hundred of those pitchers filled with gold coins to keep her safe."

He was almost knocked over by the brown, fuzzy-haired missile that practically tackled him from the side. Jane smirked at the sight of Hermione tackling Harry, and gave Lily and James a wink.

"Well...", began James, "they seem to like each other. That's a good thing... all things considered."

"Good thing the ring keeps them celibate until they marry," retorted the other man who was amused.

"Good thing they can't marry until they are at least eighteen," snapped his wife.

"Geez, mom, dad," James chuckled as he shook his head. "They can't even be in their teens. I don't think they were thinking about any of that."

Hermione's head snapped up even as she blushed and released Harry. "Of course not, Harry and I are just good friends."

Harry took her hand. "Yeah, she's great, wonderful really. I mean, we didn't mean for this betrothal thing to happen, but I, for one, am not really upset by it, though it would have been nice to have chosen it. I mean, not that I wouldn't have, I mean. Uh, I think I need to stop talking."

"Are you sure you don't have anything else to say?" teased James.

"Um, what's '*celibate*' mean?" asked Harry.

James chuckled to himself. "Oh, how I wish Sirius was here to answer that. Or here to hear me answer it. But considering your age, you probably aren't ready for any kind of answer I could put together right now."

Lily slapped her husband's hand. "Enough time to talk about such matters later." She looked over her son once again. His old, ragged clothes that were several sizes too large for him confirmed much of what Jane had explained to them. She wishes she were alive so that she could turn Petunia and her family into pigs and leave them on a deserted island for the rest of their lives. She had come up with that idea to use on the Lestranges before she had died, but never had the opportunity. But, now she determined her sister could use such a change of lifestyle.

She turned to her husband. "James, introduce your son to your parents."

James grinned, but stood up straighter. "My son, Harry, please meet your grandparents, the people who raised me, Lord Charlus Potter and Lady Dorea Potter nee Black."

Harry put on a brave smile as he stood in front of his grandparents' portrait. "H-hello. I-I'm sorry. I don't know if we have ever met before."

"I'm afraid not," answered Charlus solemnly, but with a smile. "We died before you were even conceived."

His wife slapped her husband on the shoulder. "He's eleven. He doesn't need to hear of such things!"

"I'm almost twelve," Harry added, deciding that it was vital information to give them.

"They are teasing you, Harry." Jane grinned. "They did the same thing when I was introduced to their portraits. Only then they talked of how my father came to be."

"So, they weren't always tucked away down here?" Harry asked, not wanting to focus on how one of his parents were conceived.

Her face registered surprise. "What? No, no, no! I lived with James & Lily for just a few years before you came along. But then Dumbledore said that Lord Fart-all-the-more was coming for us. Because we couldn't take everything with us, we had to leave most of it behind in the care of the family house-elves. Evidently, Fart-all-the-more had a hissy fit when he couldn't find us and went about trying to destroy everything. Except the house-elves quickly removed everything they could to storage down here."

Harry looked around at all the things in the vault. "This was all in your house?"

"Not quite," Lily said, amused. "Much of this comes from previous generations. Some are family heirlooms, others were just stored here to make room for the things of the next generation." She paused as a thought came to her. "Harry, Jane that thanks to Dumbledore and my sister who you should never have been with, you've grown up with next to no knowledge of House Potter, and yet you managed to place the Potter betrothal ring on your friend's finger. Can I see your hand?"

Swallowing nervously, Harry held up the hand with the Potter Head of House ring on it.

"Was this another suggestion of Griphook's?" she asked, though the other portrait occupants were considering this new twist on things.

He nodded. "It, uh, it did something else when I put it on. It pushed

something out of my scar on my head."

"How so?" Charlus leaned forward as did his wife.

Harry frowned, but lifted the fringe of his hair to show his forehead.

"Harry was hit in the head by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Name's killing curse," explained Hermione. "The curse bounced back and utterly destroyed the villain, but Harry was left with a lightning bolt scar."

Jane gasped. "Who told you that?"

Hermione gave her an awkward look. "Everyone knows that's what happened. It's in all the books."

"Who said that's what happened?" Jane demanded.

"Well, Dumbledore, I guess."

Jane threw her hands in the air. "The only ones to have lived through that night were Harry and I! And Harry was just a toddler!"

"So you know what happened?" Hermione said in surprise. "No one has ever mentioned that someone else was there that night."

"I suspect more of Dumbledore's meddling," Jane groused. "But I clearly remember that night that didn't happen all that long ago for me. Lord Fart-all-the-more was battling James downstairs." She glanced over at the people in the painting who were listening carefully.

"Please, don't call him that," Lily asked, with a pained expression.

Jane shrugged, slightly grinning. "Blame Sirius. He got me in the habit of doing it." James snickered in the background, only to have his shoulder swotted by his wife.

"Anyway, Lily was upstairs in the nursery with Harry and I. Lily said we couldn't escape so she stunned me and hid me under a disillusionment spell. I was caught by surprise, but I managed to partially block it. Lily was tracing something on Harry's forehead and saying something that I couldn't hear as my head was clearing."

"Oh," said the portrait of Lily. "And you said the scar is lightning bolt shaped? Oh, I think it might be related to a rune system that Selena Lovegood and I were researching. At least we were researching it around the middle of August that year. There would have been several other different runes around the room to work. The lightning bolt symbol, which is based on an older Sumerian system, would empower and protect the bearer. I have a hard time believing she would use such a thing since Selena and I determined that a human sacrifice was needed to make it work."

"Oh God!" Jane collapsed to the floor, practically hyperventilating. "She-she sacrificed herself!"

Hermione went to her immediately, pulling Harry after her. She knelt and gave the girl a shoulder hug, and motioned Harry to do likewise on the other side. Harry, unsure, mimicked Hermione to the best he could, having little experience in such matters.

"Ahem." Charlus shifted in his portrait. "I'm sorry. We don't have much time. As we understand it, my brilliant, sweet, daughter-in-law Lily sacrificed herself for Harry and Jane. The rune painted onto young Harry's forehead burned into a scar. And, just before our portraits were brought out here, Harry put on the Head of House ring and the internal magics drove something out of his scar. Here I have a problem. The magics in the Head of House ring should not have forced any beneficial magics out of the boy."

Hermione wiped away a stray tear. "There was a tar-like substance that came out of his scar. Harry paid Griphook to take a sample and have it analyzed. That should provide some answers."

"The Goblins are rather good at coming up with answers," agreed Charlus.

"We need to go," Harry said, abruptly.

Jane nodded as she wiped away her tears. "Yeah, we have to go."

"Jane." Lily leaned forward. "With Dumbledore in a coma, you have a chance to establish protections for Harry and you that he would otherwise block. We have a copy of our will. It's over on the desk.

Having it publicized will free you two from many of the entrapments he would otherwise use to control you."

Jane's eyes grew big. "The Unspeakables?"

Lily winced and closed her eyes. "I don't know anymore what he would do. He might. Especially if it separated the two of you. Go. Get the will."

Her lip stuck out, but her tears managed to not fall. "Alright."

Walking slowly, she eased around a cluster island of teacups on a tea cart and a tower of suitcases. She went to where a red box lay to one side of the desk, but just stood there for a moment. Then, she reached over to pick up a scroll that was next to the box and brought it back.

"Jane, that not our wills," spoke James.

Shaking her head in confusion, Jane looked at what she had in her hand. "I-I don't understand. You told me to get your wills, but I—"

"Someone has placed a *cunfoundus* over the box that contains the Potters most serious papers," growled Charlus. "That Goblin may refuse to talk to us, Harry. But you are now the Head of the House of Potter. You need to demand to know who the Goblins have allowed down here since my son and his wife have died."

Harry turned to address Griphook who still refused to acknowledge the activity of the paintings. Harry picked up two galleons from a nearby pile, and made ready to offer them to the Goblin.

"No, Harry!" his father shouted. "Don't offer him any money." At the boy's confusion. James added, "You can pay a Goblin for extra services, but you must never pay one for doing what their just actually requires of them. They will see it as a personal insult. Which can quickly turn into a very bloody insult."

"Also, dear," added Harry's mother, "Griphook can take down the *confundus* and retrieve our wills for you. Since it was done while under the protection of Gringotts, they are responsible to restore it to you."

Harry frowned at this, but turned to the Goblin and made the simple request. He was going to have to study the customs of the Goblin people. They were much more complex than his history lessons with the ghost, Professor Binns, ever indicated.

"What is this garbage!?"

Everyone jumped to see what had Jane so upset. The young girl was examining the contents of the scroll she had picked up, and looked as mad as when she had faced the Dursleys.

Harry didn't know what to do, but several objects began to fly across the room and smash into other things. Finally, he grabbed Hermione and dragged her over by the two paintings so that he could try and guard them all at once though nothing came near them.

"Jane!" Lily shouted. And everything became still.

Jane was still seething with the parchment crumpled in her fists. She looked up and said one word. "Dumbledore."

"What did the meddlesome berk do now?" Lily matched Jane's scowl in order for the girl to relate to her. And it worked.

"He seems to think he had the authority to sign me off in a marriage contract."

There was an uproar in the two portraits, which continued until Lily made a shrill whistle. Once it was quiet, she asked a question. "Who did he match you with?"

"You remember that annoying woman who kept pestering you with owls to betroth Harry with her baby girl?"

Harry and Hermione were clearly upset at the very idea of such a thing, and listened closely.

Jane continued her tirade. "She and Dumbledore evidently took it upon themselves to sign a contract to match me with her son!"

"Who?" Harry asked.

"Some git named Ron Weasley! Probably one of her many sons!"

"Ron?" Harry thought his brain had tripped and fell flat on the floor as he tried to understand the implications of what he had just heard. "Ron? But..." His brain floundered as it tried to right itself.

"Is that two parchments in your hand?" Hermione asked. "Two different contracts?"

Jane glanced at the second paper. "The vixen got her way. At least on parchment. This one is for Harry with her girl Ginerva Weasley."

Hermione grasped Harry's hand, squeezing it. Harry looked at her and they shared a sense of loss as well as anger and resentment toward their Weasley friends.

"It does not qualify," insisted Charlus, huffing. "Dumbledore has no authority to piece this together. Harry, as the Head of House you can nullify these... these illegalities before anyone can try to enforce them."

"Can't he use them to prove that someone was criminally interfering with another House?" asked Lily.

"Against most people, yes," answered Charlus. "But, Dumbledore is one of the names listed there so most people will not want to prosecute him even if he has been caught meddling in internal House matters."

"But he had no right!" shouted Jane.

"Then you will have to deal with it later. Yon Goblin returns, I believe, triumphant."

Griphook shuffled back looking wiped out. Sweat poured off him and his hands trembled. In one of the hands, he clenched tightly to several documents. "Here." He released them once Harry grabbed the other end of them. "Things like that *confundus* is why I am not fond of wizards."

Harry gave him a weak grin. "And here I thought you were beginning to like us."

Griphook gave a weak laugh. "Suppose there are exceptions to every rule." With that, he went over and sat on a small chest that was almost too tall for him. "That was not an easy task."

"Well, just think of it as an addition to the tale you will tell about all the treasure you accumulated today," Harry said, trying to make him feel better.

Griphook shook his head. "Vault guides are only allowed to discuss matters done in the vault with those immediately about them; your term for to is '*supervisors*'."

"Well, at least you can discuss it with them," Harry said with a shrug.

"Griphook?" Hermione stood just a little behind Harry to his right. "What Dumbledore did was wrong, illegal even I believe. But I can't help wondering..." She glanced back over at the desk where the *confunding* spell had been centered. "Could Dumbledore have had opportunity to apply any more of these despicable contracts to other children that are in situations like Harry? Children with no parents or adults that look after them?"

Griphook caught her meaning. "Usually the affairs of wizards and witches are of no concern of Gringotts. But, as I said before, if Dumbledore or any other wizard or witch, used Gringotts, especially the vaults of Gringotts, as the place of deception, making the Goblins partially culpable of the crime, then there will be blood split over the matter, or at least heavy fines levied. I will let my supervisors know of this incident, and we will search the vaults for other possible occurrences now that we know of them."

Harry nodded his approval and thanks. "I think we will take this documentation you uncovered with us so we will have more time to study it." He glanced back at his cousin and the two portrait frames. "Can I take the portraits with me?"

The Goblin frowned as he abhorred such objects. "You are your Head of House. This all belongs to you. You can take it with you or flush it all down the toilet. Personally, it's wiser to leave everything here. If you want to take the portrait frames, place them in a container to make it safe to travel with you."

"Are you all right, Griphook?"

The Goblin raised a speculative eyebrow.

"It's just you never asked for payment for that bit of advice," Harry added.

Griphook gapped for a moment before cursing about Wizards and the aftereffects of strong *confundus* spells.

Jane and Harry soon had the two portrait frames packaged to come with them. Hermione had been given the task of filling three pouches that had expansion spells on the inside. They weren't sure when they would next be able to get to Gringotts, so having extra galleons on their person made sense. There was also a shelf of books suggested by Lily that she had put together in life containing relevant information she wish she had had available as a muggleborn coming into the Wizarding world. Lily had hoped to one day put together a book for muggleborns and half-bloods to help them not get tripped up by pure-blood traps, as well as how to make use of certain things that are not advertised, but are rights available to everyone without regard to blood status. Jane had also snagged a few books that she wanted to peruse on the Sight, mind magic, and magical creatures.

"Time to face the Malfoys," Harry sighed in resignation.

"I hope we have figured everything correctly," murmured Hermione, and Harry went and gave her a gentle side hug that he still found awkward.

Harry did consult Griphook as to what extent the two Goblins with the Malfoys might try to interfere, for which he paid two galleons. Evidently, the Goblins could only hinder Harry if it can be proven that he had stolen from the Malfoys. Harry and Hermione would have to prove immediately that the Malfoys have no claim on her or it could get dicey.

As they neared the Vault entrance, Draco jumped up from where he'd been sitting on the ground in a sulk. His father had evidently been leaning against the wall of the cavern, since they were unable to transfigure chairs for themselves inside the Goblin tunnels as that

would be against the treaty the Wizarding world had with the Goblins.

"You are in so much trouble, Potty! My dad is going to make you regret the day you survived the killing curse!"

Harry and his party continued forward with Harry just managing to keep a calm smile on his face.

Lucius still looked a little ragged from the run through the streets of Diagon Alley as well as the ride down on the carts to the vaults; neither Lucius or his son were allowed to do any grooming magic so their hair was only haphazardly in place. Even so, Mr. Malfoy held his head up high and as he approached the entrance.

When Hermione was five feet away, Lucius began to read from the script of the paper that would bind her to his house. To save anyone anymore bother than was needed, Hermione simply raised her hand to show the betrothal ring on her finger.

As Lucius glanced up from his reciting, he spotted the ring and the words seemed to catch in his throat. "You... you dare!" He lunged forward to grab a hold of her, forgetting for a moment that she still stood inside the Potter vault. As he grabbed her wrist, the wards of the vault flared, and his hand was engulfed in flames.

Hermione screamed at the same time as the elder Malfoy. She pulled free, although she was in slight shock, she was relieved to see her hand was unharmed and that Harry was holding her.

"You should know better than to try to steal from the vaults of House Potter," Jane said, as she watched Lucius struggle to put out his flaming hand with his expensive jacket. Draco stood uselessly to the side, staring in horror at his father, and trying not to retch at the smell of the burning flesh.

When the magical flames finally died, Lucius took out his hand to exam in. The skin had practically melted off and the flames had charred much of the muscle leaving exposed bone. The adrenalin was keeping him from feeling the full brunt of the pain, and shock was barely being held away by his occlumency training. "Fortunately, I

can have this fixed," he said through his teeth.

"Guess again." Jane stood tall with her feet set apart, her elbows out and hands on her hips. "These are Gringotts wards. That was cursed flames set to mark and disable potential thieves. And that is just so they can interrogate them and put them to work cleaning out dragon pens. As for healing, James told me that they are extremely difficult to do, and that only the Goblins have the knowhow, so it is extremely expensive as well."

Draco was more than livid that this unknown upstart would mock his father. No one does that to a Malfoy. He pulled his wand out of his pocket and pointed it at the girl who looked like a close relative of Potter's.

"Draco! No!" Lucius lashed out and struck his son in the face before he could shout out a spell. Unfortunately, with the way his body was angled, he had had to use his injured hand to stop Draco. The new rush of pain dropped him to one knee and he was gasping air through clenched teeth.

Draco had fallen a few feet from him. He sat up and stared at his father in stunned silence, not even noticing the bloody imprint his father's hand had left on his face.

Lucius finally looked over at his son who was giving him the eyes of a puppy that had just been kicked. "If you had used your wand down here, especially to curse someone, your life and possibly my own would have been forfeit according to the treaty the Goblins have with us."

The words seem to make sense to Draco, but he couldn't help staring at the man who had never raised a hand to him before.

"Pick up your wand. We need to go seek a physician before I pass out." He climbed to his feet and moved to the cart to take them topside. Draco, after a moment, got up and got his wand, and followed after him, as did the two Goblins who had brought them down.

"Take us out of here," Lucius growled to the driver of the cart.

Standing up, he faced the Potter vault. "You haven't heard the-"

The cart lurched forward, almost knocking Lucius onto the rail. Draco had to grab ahold of his injured hand and pull him back in.

Jane stepped out first followed by Harry and Hermione. Griphook stood to the side and grinned as he had enjoyed the entertainment. Seeing no other obstacles, they loaded the portraits in the cart and got themselves in, Griphook, sitting up front with his crystal pitcher and numerous galleons, set the cart to climb up.

AuThOr'S NoTeS:

Sorry for the delay. Family things and all that. One of which was I got to spend five night, six days at Pacific Beach, WA. My wife was amused that I spent an hour of so walking in the surf while reading a book. She had the good sense to sit in a chair and read a book.

Now I will be working more Stranger Things items into the story, it just won't be happening yet. But first we have other things to focusing on like what happened to Hermione. Plus, Jane/Eleven needs to get ready for her first year at Hogwarts. Won't that be fun!

7. Chapter 7 - Stranger Settings

Chapter 7 – Stranger Settings

It had been momentarily hairy when they left the premises of Gringotts. Evidently someone had sent aurors to help the Malfoys with any difficulties they would have in retrieving Hermione. However, the aurors had difficulties of their own in the form of Professor Minerva McGonagall. There were two of them, but she verbally rebated each of them. Rawl Snafu she was sure never received the OWLS necessary to become an auror; Zero Calstetti was definitely not in shape to be an auror. Both men cowered under the rebuke, yet still managed to insist that the girl Hermione come with them to the *Solum Orphanage*.

Minerva managed a cold smile. "I think it better that we take this issue to your superior: Madam Bones. She asked me to come by and compare notes after this matter at the bank."

Neither auror were pleased with that. "If you please, professor," began Calstetti, "the young miss needs to go to *Solum Orphanage* first. The people in charge there were very specific."

"Madam Bones was very specific, too, and she is your boss."

"That may be," Calstetti said, trying to sound appeasing while wiping his face with a small towel that he apparently needed a lot. "But, the Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic is at *Solum Orphanage*. She's-" Here he paused, unsure how to phrase what he wanted to say. Sadly, McGonagall remembered this trait of his from his school days. She found it annoying then, too. If left to himself, he would stay there thinking about what he was trying to say for five or more minutes, unless someone interrupted him.

"She's going with her betrothed to go see Madam Bones," the professor finally said.

"But she can' na be betrothed!" Rawl Snafu blurted out, alarmed.

Hermione blushed, and with a thin smile she held up her hand to

show her ring.

"Whaz that symbol for? Wha' house?" Snafu blurted, showing more of his ignorance.

"House Potter." Harry held up his Head of House ring.

Calstetti, thick as he was, definitely knew more than his partner. "Er, right, right, we, uh, we evidently have missed some updates in this case, yeah? Uh, sorry to have troubled you, uh, lord. Er, my Lord Potter. Um, Professor. Ladies." He quickly backed away, dragging his confused partner by the wrist.

"That went too easy," Jane said quietly.

"I'll take easy," Harry said, as he continued to watch the two inept aurors leave.

Minerva laid a hand on Hermione's. "Unfortunately, this is not the end of it. We should go to see Amelia right away. I know she is having a busy day with all we have already revealed to her earlier, but I have a feeling that this *Solum Orphanage* matter will try to be covered up if possible. And we don't want to be part of what is covered up."

Hermione gasped. "You think they would kill us?"

"I would not put it past some of them. With what they are doing, they have already proven to have low morals."

"Then we should get going." Harry glanced around at the buildings. "Um, where exactly are we going to?"

"To the *Leaky Cauldron*," answered the professor. "From there we will floo to the *Ministry of Magic*. Amelia should still be there. She will still be busy with everything we shared with her earlier today, but she should still see us."

Jane froze. "You want us to go to the Ministry."

McGonagall nodded. "Yes, Amelia Bones is our best ally in-" She finally noticed that Jane looked terrified. "Jane?"

"I..." The ground began to tremble around her until Harry put a hand on her shoulder. "Sorry. Really. I... It's just that the last time I was there... the Unspeakables, they... experimented on me. Torture, really. I-I don't want to go near the Department of Mysteries. If I do, I don't know if they would ever let me out again."

Hermione had gently hugged her, which surprised Harry since he thought Hermione only knew how to tackle-hug, plus, he didn't know much about what to do when someone was crying. Especially, not a girl.

"No one is going to let the Unspeakables have you," she said calmly.

Jane looked up to Harry. "You will come save me if they do?"

Harry managed a brave smile. "Wild hippogriffs couldn't stop me."

A short time later, the three witches and one wizard exited the floor into the *Ministry of Magic*. A few people were still leaving that evening when they went to check their wands.

"Names and wands," said the bored security guard. "As it is now after six, I need to know the reason for your visit."

"Professor Minerva McGonagall," said the professor as she handed over her wand. "We are here to see Amelia Bones in the DMLE."

The guard looked up, bored. "Yeah, she's usually up there."

Hermione was next. "Hermione Granger. Um, I don't have my wand with me." The guard rolled with his eyes and motioned to her to follow McGonagall on through.

Harry handed his wand over. "Harry Potter."

The guard froze for a moment, glanced toward the boy's scar, then scanned his wand.

And last came, "Jane Potter. I don't have a wand yet."

The guard's eyes darted back and forth between Harry and Jane,

noting some of the similarities. "I thought there was only one Potter left."

"You were wrong," Harry said, simply. "She's my cousin."

The guard shrugged, considering it above his paygrade. "Right, then. You know the way?"

"I do," McGonagall said, as she led the three children over to the lift even as they stared at the statues and other gaudy artwork.

"And that, children," Minerva said, "is why I tell my Gryffindors to apply themselves at their schoolwork; so they don't have to get stuck doing dead-end jobs."

As the lift door closed and they were carried away, a dark figure emerged from the shadows and moved deeper in the building.



The secretary looked annoyed, but she let the four people into Madam Bones' at Amelia's request.

Amelia Bones had just sent out three of her aurors all of whom looked rather frazzled. Amelia was at her desk as she finished signing a note, then tapped it with her wand, which prompted the parchment to fold itself into a paper airplane right before flying out the door on its own. Harry just managed to resist snatching the paper airplane out of the air; the look on his face made Jane snicker.

She looked up at McGonagall with strong, but tired eyes. "Tell me you haven't brought me any new troubles to my door."

Minerva looked amused and sat down. "We have had an encounter with the Malfoys who tried to claim Hermione. While hiding in one of the Potter vaults, they came upon an unusual solution."

Amelia messaged her forehead. "Yes, I received the messenger ball from Jane. I sent one of my aurors, but he was detained in an altercation in the Leaky Cauldron, and could not leave once spells were fired. Whether this was purposeful or not to keep him from reaching you, I do not know. I am still having my staff vetted, and

many of them hate me for that."

"They hate it because they are being caught," Harry stated flatly.

Amelia sighed. "Some, yes. Others, they hate that their loyalty was being questioned."

"It's never easy being in charge," Minerva pointed out. "Especially when you enforce the rules as they are meant to be enforced."

"Yes, yes," Amelia said dismissively. "Now how did you get away from the Malfoys camped in front of your vault? I bet that cost them a pretty pile of galleons to park there."

Minerva looked at Harry and Hermione, waving them forward to speak.

"Um, well," Harry began. "Our guide, Griphook, he gave us some advice."

Amelia's eyes widened a bit, threatening to cause her monocle to fall out. "For free?"

"Well, no. Jane kinda showed me how to purchase extra help from the Goblins. While she wrote to you with that messenger ball, I asked Griphook for some ideas." He didn't go into how much he had paid for that service. "Griphook had me take on my Head of House ring." He held up the ring to show her.

"Ah, so it is Lord Potter now," she said, Amelia's mind already gauging all the ramifications. The ministry and Dumbledore would have a lot less say in the life of the young lord.

"Um, yeah, and Hermione..., well..." He looked at his friend with small pleading.

Jane just snickered, grabbed Hermione's arm and raised it so Madam Bones could see the ring, embarrassing the young witch.

"A betrothal ring?" Amelia's eyes danced in amusement my to the two kids' chagrin. "Ah, yes, that would put a stop to any claim the Malfoys would have on you."

"That isn't all," Jane said, handing her two pieces of parchment. "Read them. We found them in the vault. Guess who put them there?"

She opened them critically, checking with her monocle for any magical influences. "Marriage contracts? Those are rarely done." She stopped when she got to the names. Then she looked at the second one. Having read them, she placed them on the side of her desk. "Dumbledore has been busy. And that damn Molly has dragged poor Arthur into another mess of hers."

"This Molly Weasley has been after Harry to marry her daughter ever since she produced a girl. And somehow, she got Dumbledore to tie me onto one of these to a son of Molly's, too."

"That might take some time to rectify," Bones said, her mind busy as she thought of the matter.

"Explain," Jane said coldly. Hermione, for her part, clutched tightly to Harry's hand.

"The Wizengamot had awarded Dumbledore guardianship over Lord Potter after Sirius Black was sent off to Azkaban."

Harry shook his head. "That means he left me abandoned at night on the Dursley's front step on the First of November before he even legally was allowed to."

"...yes, I believe you are correct, Lord Potter."

"Please, can you just call me Harry. I really don't know how to relate to this Lord Potter stuff just yet."

Amelia allowed a small smile. "Very well, when we are not in public, but my addressing you as a lord in public will help cement your position with the Wizengamot and the public."

Harry's shoulders slumped, as he resigned to his fate of being stuck as a lord of an old and fancy title to go along with his other titles.

"Back to what I was saying." Amelia leaned forward. "Dumbledore was given guardianship of Harry. We can assume he managed to get guardianship of Jane as well through some means. Thereby, he made

these marriage contracts. That being the case, it is up to us to prove he never had the authority to make such a binding agreement."

"We have my parent's will," Harry said. "Their portraits, which we also have, said we need to publicize it so that it will prove what was supposed to happen with Harry if they were to die, and it also would show that Pettigrew was the secret keeper and not Sirius. Sirius was supposed to raise both Jane and I. Instead, he dumped me with the Dursleys and suspended Jane in time for a decade."

"Can I see the will?" she asked, with her hand held out.

Harry didn't know how to open the box that contained the Potters' will, so Jane showed him the place where he was to place a drop of his blood to release the locks.

Amelia spent nearly ten minutes reading the will before handing it back. Minerva asked if she could read it next, and Harry nodded.

"Please," Hermione asked, "is there any more information on the other girls that were taken to the orphanage? Are they safe?"

Any sign of amusement left the head of the DMLE's face. She sighed heavily. "There are complications to that matter. This *Solum Orphanage* has been used in the past. About four hundred years ago, around the time of the witch hunts and after a harsh outbreak of dragon pox, this orphanage was used as the staging area to take all the muggle-born girls. Once gathered, the families in most need of their service would be selected to take them. It's supposed to be a very honorable thing."

"I think you mean," Hermione stated coldly, "is that the girls taken from their *imperio*-ed families would be sold to the highest bidder. The girl would be turned into a brood-mare for the family that bought them. Then after producing an heir for the family, she's be either be killed, *obliviated* and cast out into the world, or sold to another sterile pure-blood family to be brood-mare again, or turned into a sex slave." She glared at the witch behind the desk. "Did I leave anything out?"

Amelia gasped and took the girl's free hand. "Uh, according to what

history tells us, the muggle-born girls were given freely to the pure-blood families. That's another thing to tack on to the charges against the orphanage. But I want to go over the other thing you said; you think your parents were *imperio*-ed?"

Hermione nodded, her eyes filling with tears. "I've been thinking about it and it's the only thing that makes sense. They were not acting like themselves. And then for so many other muggle-born girls to suddenly sign away all rights to their children at the same time... I mean really, what else could it be?"

Amelia was jotting everything down. "I'm afraid you may be right about some of this. Maybe even all of it. These concerns, especially provided to me by a Lord of a Most Ancient and Most Noble House," she nodded to Harry, "-can now be examined. No one can deny an investigation since now it involved the betrothed of House Potter."

"What about the girls at the orphanage?" asked Jane. This whole mess had her thinking of her time in the Hawkins National Laboratory where she had been experimented on by the twisted man who had made her call him '*papa*'. And now being so near the *Department of Mysteries* where Dumbledore had allowed the Unspeakables to experiment on her, too. She was having to tightly reign in her emotions.

"My aurors are still conducting interviews. None of the girls are admitting to having a problem with the arrangement they are in."

"That's impossible!" Hermione shouted. "The majority of them were hysterical and being forced to take calming draughts! I wasn't the first person to try and escape that place either!"

Harry tried calming her down, while Minerva mentioned an idea. "What if they used the *imperius* curse on the girls?"

"The aurors have been checking for that and have found no signs."

Hermione's gasp surprised everyone. "It's that magical contract! That would give whoever owned it complete control over the girls, including that they can't complain about being subjugated to this... this..."

"That would also explain why the Malfoys were so determined to enforce their contract on Hermione," Harry spoke. "They wanted to silence her, before she leaked the news of what they have done. They don't want a valid complaint."

Amelia was already writing a note. "I'm going to have a few of my specialists go over these contracts."

"Amelia," Minerva raised her hand to stop her from sending anything. "Have these specialists been vetted yet?"

The Head of the DMLE groaned in frustration. "And you manage to put even more work on my desk. Minerva, why don't you just go back to Hogwarts for a while and just leave me alone for a year or five. I might dig myself out from this mess by then."

Minerva let her eye go to the three youths with her. "I seem to be having troubles of my own keeping up with these three." She paused. "Which reminds me, there were two aurors that met us as we were leaving Gringotts. Rawl Snafu and Zero Calstetti, they seemed very determined that Hermione return with them to the orphanage. They seemed rather upset to find that Hermione is now betrothed."

"Snafu and Calstetti? Are you sure it was them?" Amelia said coolly.

"Definitely, I easily remember them from teaching them at Hogwarts. I'm surprised either had the marks to become aurors."

Amelia was writing again, this time on a different piece of parchment. "They joined before I took office so I'm sure there was some pure-blood nepotism involved. They are a bunch of incompetent oafs, and that is speaking nicely of them. They are also supposed to be serving a month of suspension."

"Evidently, they are subsidizing their income working security in keeping all the girls from escaping the orphanage," stated Harry, who looked very angry as he hugged Hermione. "All while claiming to still be fully authorized aurors."

"Those two are just barely pawns in this." Amelia opened and closed her fist on a jelled stress ball that Arthur Weasley had shown her one

day. He couldn't figure out what it was for, but she knew just by seeing it. "It's the higher ups I want to dig my talons into."

"Those two toadie guards," Jane quickly interjected. "They mentioned that the Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic was waiting to see Hermione brought back to the orphanage."

"That pink toad." Amelia's face had become as of stone as she thought of her almost constant nemesis toward progress and justice. She didn't speak and neither did anyone else for over a minute as she thought.

"When it rains, it floods," she finally said. "This just became even more dangerous for you, Miss Granger."

"P-please call me Hermione," she said, trying to remain calm.

"Hermione, then. So far only you seem to be the one that can stop this whole orphanage matter with your testimony. We need to keep you safe."

"Amelia," Minerva began, "perhaps you could make a copy of her memories of her time in the orphanage. It might give you more to go on. Also, if it becomes known you have copies of her memories, then there would less likely be any attacks to silence Hermione."

They all agreed with that and wisps of memories were soon being extracted from Hermione and placed in bottles. Those bottles were labeled and then copied several times to lessen the chances of being stolen. Minerva even volunteered to keep one copy with her at Hogwarts.

"Ok, leave so I can work on this," Bones said, with a hint of teasing. "Merlin knows, I probably won't be safe from you turning up more problems for me until Minerva gets you lot safely behind strong wards."

The ride down the lift was quiet. The Atrium of the Ministry of Magic was empty and quiet at this late hour and they could hear the echoes of their footsteps, only passing a few clerks winding up their day.

As their neared the floo exits, dark robed figures separated from

various shadows of the Atrium. At first, McGonagall thought they were Death Eaters, but there was no white mask.

Jane was more familiar with who they were. "No!"

Harry pulled out his wand and did Minerva once she heard the fear in her charge's voice.

Minerva cast her patronus and quickly whispered in the white ethereal cat's ear. "Amelia Bones. We are in the Atrium. It's the Unspeakables." And she sent it flying away.

"The girl known as Jane Potter, born Jane Ives, otherwise called Eleven, will come with us."

Harry stood tall and kept his wand pointed at the speaker. "I'm Harry Potter. And I am her Head of House." He raised his other hand to show his house ring. "She isn't going anywhere with you."

The speaker of the Unspeakables just tilted his head slightly. "We are not asking permission anymore. We will have answers."

The seven Unspeakables all disappeared with a slight cracking sound as did Jane.

"Jane!"

McGonagall said something foul that was most likely Scottish in origin. She quickly sent another message by cat-patronus to Amelia, this time adding that the Unspeakables had kidnapped Jane.



Jane appeared in a dark room along with the seven Unspeakables. Jane didn't think, she just reacted. Using her powers, she lashed out, throwing the robed figures around the room as if they were caught in a twister, letting them bash about the room.

After a minute of that, she let them drop as she ran out the door, her nose dripping blood. She hurried down a corridor, then duck down a hall that had the legs and wings of insects that were five or more feet in length mounted on it. She took another turn when she saw a

cabinet with glass tablets that seemed to have writing made of fire burning on it. She came to an opening that seemed to be a big warehouse filled with stacks of shelves filled with glass globes, some of which glowed from a white wispy cloud caught inside it, while others remained a dull brown, as if a light bulb that had burned out.

Seeing a figure moving through the aisles of shelves, Jane doubled back and ran as quietly as she could, taking corners. She stumbled into a spinning room with many doors. When the spinning stopped, she opened one at random. Beyond the door, everything was underwater, as if she had opened a door to deep beneath the ocean, and only magic was keeping the water from rushing in and crushing her. Something luminous was swimming in the distance and she realized that it was coming closer. She quickly closed the door to choose another, but had to endure the room spinning around her again as if she were caught in a giant roulette table. Finally, she chose another door. This time it opened into a dark void with what looked like planets hanging in the darkness. Whether it was magical models of the solar system or if the Unspeakables had managed to open up a viewing portal deep in outer space, she didn't take time to debate with herself. She slammed the door shut and had to endure the room of doors spinning around her again.

She opened another door which opened into a large, dark rectangular room. Near where she entered there was a large aquarium. She was surprised as she moved more toward the center to the room to see that there were several doors along the walls.

A splash from the aquarium tank drew her attention. Swimming inside the yellowish fluid of the tank where what appeared to be brain-shaped creatures of some type that seemed to move around due to movement of their tentacles. "Merlin!" she gasped in fear.

Not Merlin, came a thought directed at her. The thought was cold and harsh. It hinted at a brutality she couldn't comprehend. *Free us now!*

Jane found herself taking a step forward, and then another. She fought to not listen to the commands, but she had left her mind too open and the brains would not let her close them out.

Once she was at the tank she began to open the lid, so as to uncover

the tank. Several brains began to rise to the surface of the sulfur-scented liquids, each reaching out with ribbons of moving images that she had earlier assumed were tentacles. *Come to us. Share with us your knowledge and experiences. Feed us your identity.*

But, before any of them could reach her, one of the doors opened. The Unspeakable spoke, "No! Get away from there!" and rushed forward.

That distraction was all Jane needed. Using her mind, she scooped up several of the brain creatures and flung them at the Unspeakable who had no time to deflect them. She then raced from the room thru the nearest door before the brain things could catch her off guard again.

It was dark with stone walls. She didn't realize there were stairs until she was stumbling down them. She managed to grab a hold of the railing to keep from tumbling too far, but she was going to have some nasty bruises. It was only then that she realized that her nose was bloody. She didn't bother with a handkerchief and wiped the blood with her sleeve.

It was another long rectangular room with a sunken stone pit at the center. An ancient archway stood on a dais in the pit that was partial covered with a tattered black curtain that fluttered despite there being no breeze. There were benches above it that encircled the pit as if in judgement or for a more observational purpose.

Jane was about to go back, but she could hear more Unspeakables through the door she had left open trying to free their brethren from the brain creatures.

She hurried down the stairs, she looked for another way to escape. There were no other doorways in view. The only thing that seemed to even be a way out would be if the strange archway was a portal.

She glanced around the room again. There was only the door she entered through. And that led back to where the brain things were and the Unspeakables were no doubt gathering.

Feeling desperate, she looked at the archway again. Soft, almost inaudible whispers seem to come from it, but it was not vicious or

directed at her like with the brain creatures.

She closed her eyes, almost as if praying, tears pushing their way out through her eyelids. She would not let herself be subjected to the Unspeakables again. It was not an option as far as she was concerned. The Unspeakables were cruel and single minded in their determination to learn how she did the things she did. In so many ways they reminded her of her 'papa' when she had lived at the Hawkins National Laboratory with her sister, Eight.

She hurried into the pit and onto the dais in the middle. She glanced back, but there was not pursuit yet. She knew she didn't have much time. Tentatively, she reached out a hand and brushed the tattered curtain over the barrier. There was no reaction though she did realize that the whispering was louder now that she was closer to archway.

"Eleven! No!" called out an Unspeakable from near the doorway.
"Jane! Don't go in there!"

"I won't let you experiment on me anymore!" she cried out defiantly, just before stepping through the *Veil of Death*.

On the other side of the archway, the room appeared to be different from where she had been, but very similar. The air was colder for some reason, and there were little bits of light coming from the walls just enough to see everything in a grayish darkness. Root-like tendrils were attached to the stone walls, floor and ceiling.

She walked around to the other side of the archway and was pleased to see no sign of the Unspeakables. "Ha!"

She started for the stairs when she stepped on something metal sounding. Looking down, she kicked something under something that looked like moss. Where her foot met made a 'chink' sound. She reached down and was surprised to see a chain. Pulling on it slightly, she was surprised to see it was actually manacles attached to a skeleton.

She gave a small scream. And the whispers stopped.

Jane looked around and could now make out several other skeletal

figures slumped across the floor or against the wall. On many she could see manacles.

Her mind tried to understand what she was seeing. Was this some type of sacrificial pit? Was this another dimension? Were these skeletons pushed thru the archway that she had come thru?

She heard a noise in the distance. The whispers were speaking again, too, only a lot louder and with excitement.

Suddenly, Jane didn't want to be here anymore.

AuThOr'S NoTeS:

Yes, Jane has gone thru the Veil of Death and on the other side found the Upside Down from Stranger Things! How many people saw that coming? Next chapter will of course resolve around Harry trying to save Jane. Jane, of course, will be doing her level best to survive.

R&R. Hope you like it. If you have ideas, I'd love to hear them, but I can't promise to implement any since I do have some set goals ahead. But I may be able to add some and give you credit if I do.

Thanks for reading.

8. Chapter 8 - Stranger Predicaments

Chapter 8

Saul Croaker quickly walked as fast as he could to keep up with Amelia Bones. He was finding it difficult to maintain a dignified look as befitted an Unspeakable, but it was difficult to do that wearing full robes of his office. "It must be that damn Stu Curmudgeon. He put up a huge fuss when James Potter refused him anymore access to Eleven. He would-"

"Her name is Jane!" Harry barked, from where he marched after them.

Saul winced. "Sorry. All the parchments I have read regarding your cousin referred to her as '*Eleven*'. Old Stu was always taking the personability out of whatever project he was working on, claimed it got in the way of doing proper research."

"Sir," Hermione said, "if this particular Unspeakable takes the humanity out of his work, he is also removing the humanity out of himself. Doesn't that make him a danger to your department? If you know this about him, shouldn't he have been removed way before now?"

Saul chuckled. "I've heard about you, Miss Granger. I think my department, Amelia's department, and several others have decided to keep an eye on you so as to consider offering you a position for after you graduate. Stupid pure-blood politics be damned, you are too good to let go. Fortunately, thanks to the policy that keeps most Unspeakables identities secret, we actually have more muggle-borns and half-bloods in our department than we have pure-bloods. That doesn't stop some of the pure-bloods like old Stu from managing to gather a small group of likeminded pure-bloods together."

Hermione frowned. "Pure-blood politics could have blocked me from getting a career in the Ministry?"

Saul nodded. "Sorry to say there is a lot of nepotism that goes on around here. Several departments can barely function because of it."

You know what that is, yeah?"

"Nepotism mean giving priority for jobs and opportunities to those of your family or those you favor." She looked as she had been kicked in the gut. "But... priority for jobs and advancement should be given to those most qualified intellectually and skilled, not because of blood status."

"Agreed," Amelia said, calmly. "That's one of the things I and, unfortunately, a few others try to promote in the Ministry. But it isn't easy going against the Old Guard."

"Especially since a good part of that '*Old Guard*' is basically corrupt, eh, Amelia?" Croaker said with a wink.

Amelia Bones rolled her eyes and marched into the elevator with Harry, Hermione, her two bodyguards and Saul Croaker and one of his fellow Unspeakables. The rest of the Unspeakables that had come with Saul rushed to the other elevator. Amelia understood that Saul had been blindsided by the kidnapping by his people. He'd even provided Stu's actual name so that she could arrest and prosecute him if she wished. The fact that Stu and his people had engaged the wards around the Department of Mysteries so that no other Unspeakables could get in had also raised Saul's ire.

Amelia glanced back at the two children. Harry was staring hard at the elevator floor, but Hermione was holding his hand and whispering something to him in a clear attempt to keep him calm.

When they got to entrance of the Department of Mysteries, Saul had them all stop as he studied the ward preventing anyone entering. "Damn Stu has been busy. This will take a few moments."

"You run this place!" snapped Harry. "Can't you just order the wards to open up?"

"It's not as simple as that, Lord Potter." Saul ran his wand up and down in front of him as red illuminous letters and number as well as several glyphs appeared in lines and graphs. "Nothing ever is in this department."

Madam Bones placed what she hoped was a calming hand on Harry's shoulder. "Give him the time he needs to do this. Saul is a good man, for the most part. He isn't stalling. You'll learn more about these kind of wards in your fifth year, if you take the right classes. Saul has butted heads with Stu Curmudgeon more times than you would believe. Trust me when I say they are not fans of each other."

"Then why has this Curmudgeon bloke been allowed to remain an Unspeakable?" Harry demanded.

"His family," answered Amelia. "Plus, he gets answers. They might be messy and several kinds of horrible, but he gets the answers to what he whatever he was working on, plus a whole lot more."

That did not calm Harry down. If anything, it made him more determined than ever to save Jane, and hopefully, bring this Stu Curmudgeon down as he did so.



Jane hurried down the corridor trying not to let her panic make her crash into anything. There was just enough light emanating from blueish moss that she could make out most things so she avoided tripping too much. The falls she did have were definitely going to leave a bruise. She then heard a scuffling against the stone floor. There was definitely something moving in the corridor behind her. Filled with fear, she ran, just like she had run from the Unspeakables. Only this time she didn't know what she was running from.

She turned a corner and saw a doorway. She breathed in relief to see on the other side were stairs leading up. *Up has to be better than down*, she thought. Hurrying up the stairs had to be done in stages as she kept running out of breath.

Peeking through the doorway, she recognized the atrium of the Ministry of Magic. Everything was dark and gloomy, a cobweb of some type of vines were spread over the walls and ceiling. There were chittering noises that seemed to come from unknown locations, but Jane was sure that it wasn't nearby or responding to her. The air was cold, and there were a few snowflake things floating in the air that may have been spores of some kind.

It was then she was able to just stop and realize just how much the rooms and decorations were just like on the other side of the archway she had just gone through. It made her wonder if this was some type of simulation, or if she had been transported to some kind of reflected dimension based off of the one she had come from. Or, perhaps she had died, and this was the afterlife. She didn't like the first two thoughts, but the last one terrified her. She was beginning to wonder if escaping the Unspeakables was preferable to what was happening to her now.

Taking a few breathes to calm herself, Jane started to go toward where she remembered the exit was when what appeared to be a fiery ghost-like being floated in from the far end of the atrium before heading up higher toward the higher offices. The wake of the flaming ghost seemed to unsettle sheep sized grasshopper-like creatures that poured out of dark holes in the walls.

Jane ducked into a nearby door intent on saving her life. She leaned against the door, prepared to have to keep the giant grasshoppers out, shuttering in horror. It was a simple push door, so there was no handle or even a lock. If one of those creatures wanted in, all it would have to do is push against the door for it to open. As several minutes passed, Jane realized that she just might be safe. "What do I do? What do I do?" she said, as she rubbed her cold hands together.

She looked around the room and noticed, despite the dim lighting, that it was actually a bathroom for women. Going to the sink she quickly learned that the water that came from the faucet was not something she wanted to drink. She hoped she never had to.

Wondering how long she might be stuck in this strange land, she wondered what Harry was doing. She hoped he was able to get help from Madam Bones. If he just stormed the Department of Mysteries on his own, he would surely lose. And then there was Hermione. Jane barely knew the girl, but thought there was a good connection between her cousin and Hermione. She couldn't help wondering that if she never got rescued from here, if Harry and Hermione did get married and had children some day, would they name one of them Jane after her. And why was it so cold here?

A mirror was on the wall over the sink and covered mostly with a

gray, dry moss. Despite the moss, as Jane looked in the mirror she saw something that seemed wrong with her reflection. Using her sleeve, she wiped away a large enough section of the mirror so that she could see herself more clearly.

What she finally saw gave her more than just a fright. She found herself frozen as she stared at the image of herself. Floating inches above her were four tiny winged creatures that looked like something between a bumblebee and a squid. Coming from what she presumed was its mouths were long tentacles that stretched down and went into her ears. Two were hovering over one ear, and the other two were staying airborne over her other ear.

She let out a shrill scream even as she reached up with both hands, grabbed the tentacle-mouths, and yanked them out of her ears. There were minor pops in her ears as they came out and left her ears stinging. She swung the intrusive creatures in a circle around her head once, as they buzzed in alarm, then she flung them down hard against the bathroom counter. Not letting them go, she swung them down twice more against the counter before letting them go.

One of the little beasties wasn't moving. The other three slowly made themselves upright, and took to the air again weaving in a staggered pattern, buzzing loudly.

Unexpectedly, a chirping sound came from under the far end of the counter, alarming Jane who backed away and ducked into one of the bathroom stalls and shut the door. Jane struggled to calm her breathing as she peeked through the crack between the door of the stall.

From the dark shadows beneath the countertop, a tip of yellow ivory appeared, slowly growing until a purplish head appeared wearing it between its eyes. The curled and curved singular horn was around a foot and a half long. There was a smaller three-inch horn that stood up between its nostrils. Its pinkish-purple ears stuck out and twitched like cow ears shaking off flies. Its mouth was wide to almost cartoonish elongation. The neck of the creature was thin and stuck out almost a foot from the body. It twisted its body to get out from under the countertop. It wasn't until it was almost out that Jane realized that the creature had a large hump on its back like a camel.

Its purple body appeared to be armored like a turtle, but it also seemed to have been covered in glitter and what looked like gems encrusted on its back. Once it was clear of the countertop, it climbed to its clawed-hooved feet, and gave its body a great shake. Shaking its body had also revealed a three-foot-long tail with a horn protruding from it. Its hump was just a few inches higher than its head and came to over three feet tall.

Eyes large and curious glanced around, but kept darting back to the still dazed creatures that Jane had detached from her ears.

The creature chirped again and moved forward. Its long horn flashed through the air with a slight twist of its head, easily stabbing one of the floating bumblebee-squid creatures in one motion. Once the dying thing hit the ground, the purple creature lowered its head and snatched it up in its unusual looking mouth. Even as it munched away on its snack, the creature jerked its head again, slashing another of the flying bumblebee-squids. After it had eaten the three flying creatures, it noticed the dead one on the counter and, the creature made its tail swing up and over the counter and bat the little corpse into its open maw. It preceded to eat it, too, with great relish.

Looking around, the horned creature turned toward the bathroom stalls.

{yummy/happy}

A burst of something that may have been akin to telepathy, but wasn't quite that, popped into Jane's mind startling her. It wasn't words really, but a type of empathy tied together with sensations. She winced at thinking that the bumblebee-squid things were tasty, and she could pick up the aftertaste with her mind which she found only somewhat disturbing as it reminded her of celery, ink, and something undeterminable.

{lonely/worried/anxious}

The new assault of emotions and thoughts made her breath catch in her throat. *What in Merlin's name...* She glanced out through the gap in the stall only to jump back when she saw a large yellow eye looking back at her.

The purple beast chirped again, which was not quite like that of a bird.

{hope/friendly?}

"Friendly? You're friendly? Right?" Jane said, trying to keep her voice steady. She was prepared to shove it back with her mind if it made a wrong move.

The purple creature looked at her with eyes that did not have any signs of hostility.

"Ok, ok. I'll come out. Just... back up, ok?" Jane looked out of the thing, nervously, but not as terrified as she had been.

{friend/hope?}

Jane unlocked the stall and stepped out slowly as she carefully checked out the creature. The beast in question actually managed to get its back half to sit like a dog which was a position Jane would not have thought it capable of. "You are one funny looking animal, what-ever-you-are."

The purple head stretched toward her, its nostrils sniffing her. Jane automatically started to hold out her hand as if it were a dog trying to get her scent. The creature brushed against her hand and Jane was surprised at the warmth and soft texture.

{nice/good/friendly}

That earned the creature a snort of amusement. "I don't know what you are, but I don't think you mean me any harm. I'm glad you are not a purple-people-eater, too."

{worried/help?}

"What? What was that? Why are you worried? I know why I am worried. I'm in some kind of freakish mirror dimension or something. But you, all I know about you is that we are hiding in the same bathroom together and you eat the things that attached themselves to my ears. So, what are you worried about?"

{worried/help?} The purple creature's head turned to the side and gave a forlorn look that made Jane 'awwwwe', without realizing it.

She was scratching the creature's ears before she knew it. "What is this help thing you need? I don't know where I am, so you have to show me. Maybe I will figure something out about what to do about myself in this place as well." An ally, even this strange beast, seemed like a good idea to Jane.

{help?}

Jane found herself following the horned creature out into the atrium of the Ministry of Magic. Several of the giant grasshoppers things living in the walls started to emerge, but her new friend made a strange bark and slapped its long tail hard onto the floor which made the giant bugs crawl back into their holes.

"That's... that's useful."

{help/hurry}

She had to hurry to keep up when the purple beast broke into practically a gallop. Somewhere along the way she began thinking about Harry, Hermione and Minerva.

Can Harry really accept me as family, even if I was kind of a secret cousin of his that Dumbledore had held suspended in time for a decade? What will he think when he hears that I was experimented on for most of my whole life? That for most of my life I thought my name was 'Eleven' like the tattoo they put on my wrist? It's so weird that baby Harry is now older than me. Now he looks like the childhood photographs of James. Harry must be practically tearing down the ministry building to find me if he is anything like James. How will he know I went through that portal? How am I going to get home? If I walk through the portal again, I'd be in the heart of the Unspeakables territory. They're sure to be waiting to capture me. They'd probably set traps. Traps that I would never recognize as traps until I was stuck in it. And what of poor Hermione. Neither she nor Harry seemed to mind that they had been tricked by a Goblin into getting betrothed to each other, but she had to be worried about her parents and all the other young muggle-born young girls that the orphanage had been illegally gathered together to be auctioned off. How

corrupt is the ministry? Minerva seemed to trust Madam Bones, but what-

The purple creature's tail slashed through the air next to Jane's head, startling her. Two of the small bumblebee-squid things fell to the ground, and where promptly eaten.

"What in Merlin's name?" Jane blinked a few moments, as she watched the creature chomp happily on its snack. "I really have to give you a name. It would help if I knew your gender." She shook her head again. "Those things make my mind wander or something. Make it hard to focus. I don't know, but thank you for..." She watched as the creature swallowed the two bumblebee-squids and gave a belch.

Its tail lashed out again, stabbing another of the flying bumblebee-squid pests. Only this one, the purple creature offered to Jane who grimaced at the thought. "No, no thanks. I ate in Madam Bones' office." That did make her wonder if she could possibly find something she could safely consume in this dingy, twisted replica of her world.

She followed her purple companion up a different set of stairs on the far side of the building. She lost count of the number of flights of stairs they had climbed. Jane had the purple creature stop and she leaned against its side as she caught her breath.

{hurry/help!}

"Ok, where to now?"

The purple beast led Jane into a wider, fancier corridor despite the grime and weird fungus and plant-like vines that crisscrossed on the walls. They were moving slower and Jane could tell from the beast trembling that her companion was scared.

{fear/courage/determined}

"Yeah, I'm trying to be strong here, too, and I don't even know what is going on." She looked her purple companion in the eye. "Are you sure you know what is going on?"

{come/help?}

"Right. Sure." She patted the creature behind its ear, but wasn't sure what she had gotten herself into.

She was more concerned when the corridor opened up to a large room filled with empty desks, all filthy and disgusting, but her companion was crouched down as much as it could to use the desks for cover. Jane followed its example even if she wasn't sure why.

At the far end of the room, next to a plaque naming '*Minister of Magic: Cornelius Fudge*', was a large open door into a very large room that seemed unusually bright. It was also somewhat warmer for which Jane was grateful. She changed her opinion of that after looking in and saw four more versions of the fiery ghost she had seen flying across the atrium earlier.

"What is this?" Jane whispered. She looked at her companion wishing it could speak. "Tell me you don't want us to go in there."

{*help/save*} This time it turned and looked at her with sad cow eyes, which threatened to pull at her heart.

"Save?" she asked again.

Looking carefully into the room, she noticed it had been divided in half with a thin fabric hanging from the ceiling, separating the room in half. The four fiery ghosts had their side of the room, which was brightly lit, while on the other side of the drapes was shadows and darkness. Something moved in that darkness, growling in an unusual pattern. Something that made shivers go up and down her spine. It alarmed her that her purple companion was also shaking which did not encourage her at all.

Just then, one of the fiery ghost creatures stepped back and revealed on the other side of it was a humanoid being bound on the floor with bands of glowing blue light.

Jane could sense the excitement of her unusual friend, and hoped it didn't mean what she thought it meant. Before she could figure out how to ask, her purple companion shuffled off to the wall and began moving toward the door.

"How did I get myself into this?" She knew she couldn't leave the poor creature to do whatever it was going to do by itself.

The heat seemed to be building up making Jane very uncomfortable. Glancing back, she was alarmed to see a fiery ghost coming up behind her. Turning back to warn her companion, she was even more alarmed to see the back side of the beast moving into the room.

"Oh Merlin!"



AuThOr'S NoTeS:

This was taking a long time to do. And then I had to do it over. Plus, all sorts of life things that get in the way of writing. So this chapter is a little short. Much shorter than I wanted. But I felt people have been waiting way too long as it is.

9. Chapter 9 - Stranger Returns

Chapter 9 - Strange Returns

Seeing her purple beast companion move into the alternate version of Cornelius Fudge's office, she had to let it worry about itself since the fiery ghost was advancing on her. She noted that some of the vine-things on the floor and ceiling pulled away at its approach leaving some of the slower, older vines to become scorched and shriveled.

"Not good," Jane mumbled to herself. Exerting her mind powers, she mentally reached out to grab ahold of the floating, fiery humanoid.

It was difficult to find anything to grab onto since the fiery ghost didn't seem to have any physical substance. Still, she managed to slow it down.

"If I can't hold you, I'll have to use other means to keep you away.

She grabbed one of the nearby office desks and slammed it at the fiery threat. The desk caught fire upon impact with the ghost, but still carried the ghost away into the wall, managing to snuff much of its flame.

She hoped she had done the right thing and turned away to check on the sounds of chaos coming from inside the large office. At the doorway, she stopped at the sight of the bedlam going on. Somehow, her purple companion, who looked like the sad, mutated lovechild of a sequined dragon, camel, cow, turtle, and possibly a unicorn, had the horn at the end of its tail jammed into what once looked to be a regal chair, and was swinging it around like a club at the ghosts. Its foot and a half long spiraled, curved horn was glowing a radiant yellowish white aura, and seemed to be repelling the fiery humanoids to some degree. One of the humanoids was sputtering feebly on the floor with what looked like part of a desktop on it.

{fight/protect/defend!}

It was then that Jane realized that her purple friend was actually trying to defend the bound captive near the middle of the floor. That

was who her purple companion had wanted her help to save.

"And now I am in it."

She mentally grabbed a large planter and sent it hurtling towards another of the fiery ghost things, but it darted to the side into the drape covering half the room, setting it on fire. On the other side of the drapes came shrill screams that sent shivers up and down her spine from her head to her toes and back again.

Jane said one of the Goblin words Sirius had taught her as an expletive as she saw the fire quickly spread. She rushed over towards the captive that her purple friend was protecting.

He was a short male. She could tell that at first glance even though he wore remnants of a strange type of leather armor. He had several kinds of cuts and bruises, not that she saw anything life threatening. He was also not human, his eyes were larger than she was used to seeing on a humanoid, and he had a long, pointed nose and ears and a full head of hair that was greenish brown in hue.

"Bo'antar must be free!" he proclaimed in an almost baritone voice that Jane had not been expecting.

"Who is Bo'antar?" Jane asked, thinking there might be more captives. She reached for his glowing bonds only to be shocked by it, and shaking her hands in pain.

"Bo'antar is Bo'antar! Bo'antar must be freed so Bo'antar can fight!"

Jane almost missed the connection. This captive was Bo'antar. *He talked of himself like a house-elf... a warrior house-elf...? Or some distant relative of the house-elf species that was a warrior?* She shook her head and checked her ears for any of those bumblebee-squid things and was more annoyed than anything when she her hand caught three of them which she promptly threw at one of the fiery ghosts hoping to immolate the daydream-inducing parasites. Sadly, they sailed right through the fiery ghosts, but neither seemed harmed by the other. Even worse, there seemed to be several of the flying parasites flying around the room in small groups.

Turning her attention back to Bo'antar, she focused on the band the bound his arms and legs together. She concentrated hard on the band, and it made her mind tingle, but she ignored it in order to pull the glowing band apart with her mind. She cried out as it burst into tiny fireworks that ended a second after they began.

She was gasping on her hands and knees, staring at nothing when Bo'antar leaned over toward her.

"Beware the Umgubular Slashkilters!"

"Wha-"

A new shriek was all the warning she had when a large form jumped through the burning drapery. It landed on the floor and stumbled to a stop, quickly trying to shake off parts of the burning drapery that had come with it. It was on all four limbs, limbs that seemed oddly long and thin for it. Its head seemed to have no eyes, ears or mouth, which surprised her. Its skin was grayish-pink and looked leathery at first sight.

Then it slowly stood up, and Jane, already afraid, realized it was somewhat humanoid. It turned its head towards her. Then, suddenly, its head seemed to peel back as if opening up like a macabre flower, and the petals held rows of jagged thorn-teeth.

"Gah!"

Bo'antar pulled her out of the way, and the Umgubular Slashkilter was thoroughly stabbed by Jane's purple companion, who with a quick twist of his purple neck, sent the body flipping through the air partially into one of the remaining fiery ghosts, causing its body to sizzle and melt away in sections.

Jane was sitting up and looking around, trying to determine what the closest threats were. Her thoughts were then derailed when she noticed various old corpses on the floor along the far wall. Several of the withered or charred bodies resembled the warrior-elf, but there was one that had the same shackles that were on the bodies she had first come across when she had crossed over through the stone archway deep in the Department of Mysteries. There were other dead

creatures that laid among the bodies with similar conditions, some that were also shackled and appeared to be wearing robes somewhat similar to what wizards and witches wore.

{protect/defend/fight!}

That snapped her out of it just in time to mentally block another of the monstrous Slashkilters had just jumped through the drapery. She tried to throw it at another one, but the one it would have hit dodged out of the way, leaving its flung companion to skid on its back across the floor before impacting painfully with the wall. Jane then used her mental abilities to grab several of the bumblebee-squids into a ball and flung it at the approaching Slashkilter. The Slashkilter merely enclosed its open mouth around the ball of fluttering things. Just before it closed its mouth, Jane released the bumblebee-squids so they now fought to escape being eaten. The Slashkilter now had an unexpected battle in its mouth as the creatures struggled to escape, distracting it momentarily, but then swallowed it down whole like a dog getting a treat.

"Uh oh." Jane backed away and tripped over one of the roots across the floor. She was sure she would have died if Bo'antar hadn't magically grabbed ahold of the Slashkilter and flung it out of the room through the doorway.

A pained, shrill outcry from behind her startled Jane. Whipping around, she was shocked to see that an even larger Slashkilter had come through the drapery, knocking the remains of the drapers down so there was no longer any barrier in the room. Even worse, the Slashkilter was standing on Jane's purple companion.

{pain/fear}

The last of the fiery ghosts lay torn in two, burning in two separate sections of the room casting eerie shadows around the room. Even so, she could see the bloody wound on the back rump of the purple creature.

It had hurt her friend. As she watched, the Slashkilter made to strike with what would most likely be a killing blow. But Jane could not allow that.

She rushed forward, and she blasted everything she had of her mental abilities at the monster before her, knocking it into the wall. She laid into it with all her anger at He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and all that he had taken from her. She hit him with all her frustrations due to the manipulations of Albus Dumbledore and his stealing years of growing up with Harry and placing him in a place where he was abused. Her hatred of the Dursleys and everything they did to her sweet Harry. And disgust at the part of society that would steal muggle-born girls like Hermione away from their family and then auction them off. She funneled her fear and frustration due to the Unspeakables, everything they had done to her before as well as their kidnapping her this time. And finally, all her remaining angst from her early years growing up at Hawkins National Laboratory with the twisted man who made her call him '*papa*'.

The energy pouring off of her was just barely visible as it held the roaring Slashkilter into place. Even the bumblebee-squids near her were turning to jelly from all the power in the air around her.

Bo'antar shouted from the door. "More Heliopaths approach! Bo'antar and his new friends must exit by other means!"

Jane could barely understand what he meant. If the creatures with the face full of teeth were the Slashkilters, then either the fiery ghosts or the bumblebee-squids had to be the Heilopaths. She was betting on the fiery ghosts. "We need a door?" she called back. "I'll make a door!"

She began pushing harder than ever at the large Slashkilter, trying to shove it through the wall so that it would make a door. She was determined to use this monster's body as a battering ram to safety. It screamed at her with pain, anger and frustration, and she screamed right back at it while not letting up.

The wall in back of the Slashkilter began to change in color from the heat and energy Jane was directing at it. If Jane had been more aware, she would have noticed reality around her and the Slashkilter began to waver.

Bo'antar had not been idle. The warrior-elf used his powers to move the bodies of the other Slashkilters and the furniture, broken and unbroken, to block up the doorway. "Bo'antar will slow them down,

but it will not slow the Heliopaths down for long." Turning back, Bo'antar was surprised to see what Jane was doing. "Bo'antar is impressed with the doorway the young one is making. Very impressed. Bo'antar will provide cover and bring the wounded beast."

Jane showed no sign that she heard the warrior-elf. If anything, she seemed to push even harder at the Slashkilter not even caring that another room seemed to be coming in to view just behind it.

The hole was soon big enough, and the thrashing Slashkilter flew across this new room and crashed into a pink wall where it knocked down several plates with animated kittens on display, shattering them.

Jane stepped through the tear in the fabric of reality back into the world of her birth. She let out another scream as she used her powers to grab a hold of a neat and orderly desk and flung it at the Slashkilter.

The Slashkilter, grievously wounded, just managed to dodge the desk that broke apart as it impacted the wall. Seeking to escape, it leapt toward the door, smashing it in its attempt to escape.

"No!" Jane shouted, as she began to run after it. She stopped at the doorway as she was hit with a wave of dizziness. Out of habit, she wiped her face with her sleeve, but stopped when she noticed that it left her sleeve drenched in blood. Reaching up with slightly shaking fingers, she noticed that everything below her nose was covered in blood. Even her shirt. Blood even seemed to have gotten into her mouth. "Oh, this is not good," remembering the warnings Lily had given her about pushing her abilities too far.

She managed to sit down on one of the pink cushioned chairs in the room, taking in deep breaths. In the distance, she could hear the Slashkilter racing away. She decided she couldn't go after it without her body possibly failing.

Glancing back, she watched as Bo'antar floated her purple companion in and placed it in the middle of a large, fluffy, pink rug, staining it with reddish-purple blood. Behind them, the tear between the two dimensions began to heal over. Several of the bumblebee-squids had

already flowed into the room, but seemed to want to stay well away from Jane.

The fiery ghosts rushed the closing dimensional rift, four managed to get inside before the tear in the wall healed over, cutting a fifth fiery ghost in half, which set the pink wallpaper on fire. Bo'antar raised his sword and attacked the burning spectral beings. "Bo'antar will put an end to these Heliopaths!" He charged one with his now glowing sword while raising his hand to use his magic against another one... only to fall to the floor crying out in pain.

Jane, seeing Bo'antar and her purple companion about to be roasted by the Heliopaths, she summoned several of the remaining kitten-adorned plates off the wall and began using them to force the Heliopaths away.

From the doorway came a loud flash, startling everyone in the room. In the doorway was a tall, thin man with long, blonde hair and a great big grin holding a camera. "Finally I have proof!"



Outside the Department of Mysteries

Harry glanced down at his family ring that he had put on just a few hours ago for the first time.

Saul Croaker and his Unspeakables were still trying to bring down the defenses to the Department of Mysteries that a renegade Unspeakable and his followers had set up after kidnapping his cousin, Jane, to experiment upon.

While holding onto Hermione's hand, he turned towards Amelia Bones, the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. "Pardon me, Madam Bones, I am still very new to all this, but my ring... it's telling me that Jane is now somewhere upstairs."

Amelia frowned and nodded. "That probably goes along with the alarm notice I just received due to a break-in to the Undersecretary's office." She turned to Saul. "Saul, you heard?"

The head Unspeakable remained concentrating on the wards before

him. "Take Runekeeper along with you. Runekeeper should be able to aid against any other Unspeakables you may run into up there. I have to continue on here before old Stu managed to add to this ward scheme."

"You never could back away from a challenge," Amelia lightly teased him.

She returned her attention back to the young Lord Potter and his betrothed. "The fastest way up is for me to apparate you two up to the outer office area. Can you stay out of danger and let me determine the situation?"

Harry bit his lip momentarily. "I can try," he finally answered.

"So like your father," the head auror muttered as she took him arm and did likewise with Hermione. One of the aurors took Minerva McGonagall's elbow since only aurors and Unspeakables could apparate inside the Ministry of Magic.

"Have you apparated before?" asked Madam Bones.

Harry grimaced. "Earlier today. Magicals really need to find a better way to get around." Hermione just nodded her agreement, not liking what was to come.

Suddenly they were all taken away and made to feel like they were being squeezed through a small opening. And just as suddenly, it was over and they were all standing in an office setting.

Hermione and Harry immediately bent over and threw up. Harry had a whole mental list of complaints about apparating. Neither the Amelia Bones, Unspeakable Runekeeper or the aurors that accompanied them could help the two teens at the moment as they were startled by the sight of Xenophilius Lovegood dancing around the doorway to the office of the Senior Undersecretary to the Minister for Magic Delores Jane Umbridge. Madam Bones was about to call out to Lovegood when the wizard, clutching his camera close to his body, dove away from the doorway. Several what appeared to be burning specters fled the office due to a hail of porcelain plates and various other objects.

"Catch those things!" commanded Bones to her aurors. "Catch them all!"

The aurors made several shields to try and contain the flaming apparitions. The auror withdrew a colored metal ball from his robes and tossed it towards one of the strange spirits which was sucked inside of the ball with a great deal of loud sizzling complaints.

The rest of the fiery ghosts managed to overcome the shield and fled through the ministry building while setting numerous small fires in their wake. The aurors gave quick pursuit leaving Madam Bones, the Unspeakable Runekeeper juggling the hot ball, and the two teens.

"Jane!" Harry called out. His ring told him that his cousin was in the room that the fiery forms had emerged from, as well as the fact that she was very weak. He rushed forward with only one the aurors keeping up with him. McGonagall transformed into her cat animagus form in order to keep up. Hermione tried to follow, but one of the aurors held onto her and they went at a slower pace toward the office.

The room was utterly destroyed, though what remained of the pink wallpaper and the porcelain plates with animated kittens displayed on them really messed with Harry's mind as to what this room must have looked like before. The damage may have been an improvement.

But it was Jane crumpled against a purple lump near a broken pink leather covered chair that was partially charred and crushed. One of the walls was burning in section, one which seemed to include the dying wisps of on the fiery ghosts.

"Jane!" Harry called out, rushing toward his cousin. Jane's face was still covered in smears of blood, but that did nothing to hide how pale she looked. "You look... are you alright?"

"Harry?" She blinked at him. "Am I back?" She glanced around the room. It was somewhat neater than where she had been, even with all the wreckage and fires, and definitely warmer. Even so, the pink décor and the cat plates almost made the other place friendlier than here.

"Um, yes?" Harry said, hoping he was answering correctly. "I don't know how you got away from those renegade Unspeakables, I'm just glad you did."

She was looking around as a few aurors and Madam Bones moved around the room to ascertain the situation and damage.

"I always hated this office," Madam Bones began. "I suppose it is too much to hope that she doesn't redecorate it the same way."

She noted one of her aurors using his wand to capture some of the bumblebee-squid things flying around the room. She motioned for another auror to help him.

"Jane," Madam Bones said softly, "I have several questions for you, but first can you tell me what these... strange creatures are? Are they dangerous?"

"They are Wrackspurts!" called out a voice from the broken doorway. "Oh my Merlin, they are not really dangerous."

"You've dealt with them before, Lord Lovegood?" inquired Bones. She knew there was more to Xenophilius Lovegood than his bizarre mannerisms portrayed.

"Not remotely," he answered happily. "I've always considered them more along the lines of metaphysical creatures. Real, but unable to be physically present in our world. I really would love to know how they got here."

Amelia glanced over at Jane. "So would I."

"Madam Bones!" called out one McGonagall who had just reverted to her human form. She pointed to a female auror had been collecting the flying creatures, but had been too distracted to notice two of the Wrackspurts from flying up behind her head and attaching their tentacle mouths into her ears. The Auror Hestia Jones did not seem to be disturbed by this fact as she seemed to be daydreaming.

"I got this," responded to Jane. "The same thing happened to me twice. The little blighters are sneaky like mosquitos. I think they are just feeding on her thoughts, but I really don't know for sure." She

was on her feet, walking just a bit unsteady with Harry helping her over to Auror Jones.

"Wrackspurts are notorious for making a person's brain unfocused," said a very happy Lovegood who was confiding this to the Unspeakable next to him as well as anyone else who happened to hear him. "Usually an infestation of them can lead to all sorts of bad thoughts like greed, vanity, anger, fear, paranoia, pride and such. But the best way a person can get rid of them is with positive thinking." He then tapped a finger against his chin. "Of course, Wrackspurts usually do their feeding from what I believe would be another dimensional plane, so having one or more feed on a person in the same dimension as them might cause a stronger or different affect."

"Yeah, I know," Jane said. Reaching out her hand, she grabbed the Wrackspurts by the tentacles and yanked them out of Hestia Jones' left ear causing the auror to jump in surprise.

"What? What in Morgana's name happened?" demanded the startled auror. She looked sick when she saw Jane holding onto the two flying creatures.

Xenophilus clapped his hands in wonder. "Did you see that? A physically present Wrackspurt has a much greater affect than an incorporeal one! Oh, there are so many implications! Don't let any of the rest of them connect with anyone until we can do so in a laboratory setting," he ordered. "And we shall have to do a full medical screening on that auror."

Jane bashed the two Wrackspurts onto the floor three times in a brutal move that surprised the others. "Sorry," she said to the others. "I wasn't sure if they had some kind of defense and I didn't want to find out." She then turned to walk back with Harry's help, still holding onto the two battered creatures.

"Jane, are you alright?" Hermione asked, as she now was in the room, too.

"Hmm, yeah, I just need to check on my friends."

"Friends?" asked Minerva.

Jane said nothing. She instead walked around the large, scorched purple mound on the pink, shag rug. Harry did a sudden intake of air as now that he was on the other side, he looked down at the semi-conscious head of a creature. It had had a foot and a half long curled and curved singular yellow ivory horn that came from a place just a little higher than between its eyes. A much smaller 3-inch horn was between its large nostrils. Its body was unusual due to its camel-like humped back, its thin, muscular legs and hooved clawed feet. There was a type of shell that may not have been a shell that seemed to have been covered in glitter and what appeared to be gems embedded in its back like sequins. Its neck was long and thin, yet supported a large head bear a wide face with an even bigger mouth.

"Hey," Jane said softly, kneeling down in front of the creature's head. "Can you hear me?" She ran her hand over the creature's face. "Come on, open your eyes. I have something for you."

The creature moved its head slightly and let out a sad chirp. {*pain/hurt/scared*}

Jane wasn't bothered by the creatures means of communication, though the others in the room were a bit unsettled by it. She didn't have time to address their concerns at the moment; her friend needed her. "Don't worry. I'm going to get you all fixed up." She brought the two Wrackspurts before her. "Look what I got for you!"

The purple creature chirped again, this time with just a hint of excitement. Jane placed the two Wrackspurts down before her purple friend, and a long tongue came out and slurped then in and began crunching them.

Xenophilus Lovegood had just finished taking pictures of several of the Wrackspurts being collected by the aurors and Unspeakable Runekeeper, now he came across a sight that just about made him drop his camera. "Tha-tha-tha-that's a Crumple-Horned Snorkack! I've been searching to find one of these for years." He glanced around the shambled room. "This is one of the last places I would have ever thought to find one of these legendary creatures." He reverently touched the sequined hide of the now identified Snorkack. "Oh, I must get a picture!"

"No!" Jane shouted, stopping the man before he could bring his camera to use. "He's not use to the light and the flash of your camera would startle him."

"She," said a whimpering voice.

Jane looked over and saw the warrior-elf half under a side table. "Bo'antar!" She moved the three feet necessary to be by the elf. "What is wrong?"

"Snorkack is a she." He groaned and dropped his head. "Bo'antar does not know what is wrong. Everything seems wrong to Bo'antar."

A series of pops happened as several house-elves appeared, all ignoring the damage around them to stare at the pain racked elf on the ground.

"Cappy sees! Cappy knows!" said a very old house-elf that had paper-thin, wrinkly skin.

"Can you help him?" Jane asked. She had been through a lot to rescue Bo'antar; she didn't want it to all be for naught.

"Cappy cannot be helping warrior-elf. But young mistress can save warrior-elf."

"How?"

"Young girl must let warrior-elf bond to her. Then warrior-elf can use cleaned magic from girl."

"No!" Bo'antar cried out. "Bo'antar will never be a slave!" The warrior-elf made to grab for his sword.

"Wait! Wait just a minute, Bo'antar!" Jane rested a hand on his arm. She wasn't sure if the elf was going to attack everyone or possibly try and kill himself. Either way she had to stop him. "I got to your... dimension... world... what ever the flip side of our world is, through a stone archway. It's down in the Department of Mysteries just past a room with a jar of brain creatures. If we could get you back down through there, you'd be all better then."

Cappy shook his head mournfully. "Young mistress is kind to think that. But that would not help. Magic from this side is already poisons warrior-elf Bo'antar. For warrior-elf Bo'antar to be able to live, warrior-elf Bo'antar must bond with witch or wizard. The bond will filter the magic of this world, so elves will not be poisoned and can do great things. Even greater things than back on the other side. It is what elves had to do when they fled to this world."

"Better for Bo'antar to die," cried the anguished warrior-elf.

"Bo'antar," Jane said. Behind her, Amelia stopped Unspeakable Runekeeper who was about to stun the elf, and entered into a hushed conversation. "Listen to me, please," said the girl. "If I were to swear by my magic that if you were to bond with me, I would consider you not as a servant, but a friend and companion. I would not give you orders or boss you around; you would be responsible for yourself." She paused, suddenly realizing she really didn't know Bo'antar very well, so she quickly made an addendum. "That is, as long as you don't go around hurting or killing people." Then she remembered the Death Eaters. "Unless those people are going around killing people, then, yeah, they deserve to be put down." She looked deep into the pained warrior-elf's eyes. "Do you understand what I am trying to say?"

Behind her, Harry and Hermione exchanged glances. They weren't sure all of what happened to Jane, but seeing her condition, it must have been intense, and this elf and the Snorkack creature had evidently helped her. Jane being willing to help Bo'antar told Hermione that Jane had the same people-saving thing that Harry had.

Jane asked a few more times before the warrior-elf finally agreed. Jane, with the help of Madam Bones, quickly put together a safe oath for her to use. Jane looked to Harry, but he merely nodded and placed a comforting hand on her shoulder.

Jane's oath had no problems as she meant every word. Bo'antar, even as sick as he was, could tell that her oath was binding, so with reluctance, he reached out and took her hand, binding himself, not to servitude, but to be her companion. He glowed briefly, then gave in to the bliss of unconsciousness.

"Cappy?" Jane asked the house-elf with concern.

Cappy, understood immediately, and began to examine Bo'antar. Finally, he looked up and smiled. "Bo'antar is becoming healthy with the binding to the young mistress."

Tears sparkled in her eyes as her looked to Harry, Hermione and Minerva. It was then she noticed Unspeakable Runekeeper and Lovegood arguing over the Snorkack.

"This beast must be examined. The Unspeakables are best equipped to doing that."

Lord Lovegood shook his head emphatically. "I am close friends with Newt Scamander, a world renown Magizoologist. He will surely come and aid in tending to this marvelous beast. I've always told him I would let him know immediately when I found the Snorkack. He promised to come when that day arrived, and it is here today!"

Even behind his or her hidden features, Runekeeper was showing signs of being frustrated, a trait many people experience when dealing with Lord Lovegood.

{pain/fear}

"Will you two knock it off. You are scaring her." Having told the two men off, Jane ignored them in order to tend to her companion, the Snorkack. She trusted Cappy and the other house-elves to see to Bo'antar's injuries. And she was certain that her cousin, Harry, had her back if she needed it.

She examined the wounds without daring to touch the injured areas. Most of it appeared superficial, but she couldn't be certain.

She turned to the two men, and pointed at Xeno. "You said you could get ahold of Newt Scamander? And that he would come immediately?"

Xeno Lovegood nodded. "I already sent an owl that I usually keep in my pocket. He'll come when he gets it."

"You sent... an owl...?" She shook her head. "Write another letter

NOW!"

Before Xeno could say anything, Jane turned to Cappy and the house-elves. "Cappy, could one of your friends do a quick letter delivery for me? We really need to get Mr. Scamander here as soon as possible."

Cappy glanced at his fellow house-elves before turning back toward the young girl. "We's can do that for little mistress."

Minerva tried to remove Jane from the room, but the nearly eleven-year-old girl was not about to leave the wounded animal. Numbing spells had been applied to the Snorkack's burns, and a few spells to stop blood lose, but any other type of treatment was on hold until Newt Scamander appeared.

And that is exactly how things were when Madam Undersecretary Delores Umbridge stood in her broken doorway and looked inside. "WHAT HAS HAPPENED HERE?"

"Oh," said Jane. "That reminds me." She turned to Madam Bones who looked like she wasn't going to enjoy dealing with the screaming short woman in pink. "Do you have anyone searching for the Slashkilter that came through?"



AuThOr'S NoTeS: 11-30-2018

Sorry, I've been sick and out of sorts. But I am up and writing again.

Ok, the other side of the Veil of Death is the same world as the Upside Down in Stranger Things.

Only one reviewer figured out that many of the creatures in the Upside Down were the ones Luna Lovegood was forever bringing up. And that was H Bregalad. Five points to their house. Did anyone else figure it out? And if so, how many?

First, the Umgubular Slashkilters is the demogorgon from Stranger Things. And I found it amusing to have Umbridge's yelling remind Jane of the Slashkilters.

The Fiery Ghosts are the Heliopaths, the very creatures that Xeno Lovegood was always saying was in league with Fudge.

The bumblebee-lizards are the Wrackspurts. I could not find a good description of them so I gave them one.

And Jane's purple companion is a Crumple-Horned Snorkack. While trying to find a good description of a Snorkack online, I happened across a site that commented Evanna Lynch, who played Luna Lovegood in the movies, claimed to have found one which was a display of a purple creature in a store that I have tried to describe to the best of my abilities. I found it amusing to make the Snorkack be the natural predator for Wrackspurts.

Runekeeper and Bo'antar are characters of my own creation.

Also I made Xeno Lovegood a lord as an explanation as to why he's allowed to be so eccentric.

10. Chapter 10 - Stranger Complications

Chapter 10 – Stranger Complications

Delores Umbridge ranted and raved as she stormed about her mostly destroyed office. A few people tried to interrupt her tirade, but she just became louder and pointed accusatory fingers at them.

Amelia Bones, having had the misfortune of working with Umbridge over the years while at the Ministry, had had enough. Searching through an expanded pocket in her jacket, she pulled out a calming draught and held it out for the venomous witch. When Delores refused the vial, Amelia felt she was left with no choice. Uncorking the vial, she tossed the greenish potion in Delores' face where it quickly absorbed through the skin.

"What-what did you do that for?" Delores demanded, still angry. "That's assault!"

"No, what you were doing to our ears was assault, Madam Undersecretary. What I did was apply a special calming draught that could be absorbed through the skin, though it is much more affective if you drank it."

Delores scowled, before accepting a hand towel that someone had conjured. "I demand some answers!" she snapped, though a little more subdued thanks to the potion.

"And we are still trying to learn what all occurred here. Unless you have an explanation for what could have caused this to happen, I suggest you let us get on with our investigation."

Despite the effects of the topically applied calming draught, Delores was still indignant. "That purple beast is obviously the culprit," she snapped, pointing toward the injured Snorkack. "Some culprit must have snuck it in here to cause vandalism." She then gave a gasp when she noticed the Snorkack's chest rising and falling. "It's still breathing? Why haven't you put the creature down yet?"

Madam Bones managed to not roll her eyes. "This is not the creature

that caused all this destruction, Madam Undersecretary. This..." She paused and glanced over to Lord Lovegood who was trying to attend to the injured creature as best he could. "This Snorkack was actually helpful in stopping the destruction."

"It's bleeding all over my specialized Yeti-skin rug!" she bellowed in outrage.

"You have bigger concerns than that, Madam Undersecretary," Amelia stated, though she eyed the yeti-skin rug that had been dyed pink. Yetis were a protected endangered species, thereby, Delores owning the skin of one, if proven that it was killed after the protection laws of the ICW were put into place, could get her sent to Azkaban. Amelia was definitely planning to follow through on that, though she doubted Fudge would allow a conviction. It would still tarnish her name and reduce her following in the Ministry. It might be all Amelia could do to avenge the sentient Yeti that adorned Umbridge's office floor, but at least it would be something.

Still, before Amelia could do anything about that, she needed more information from the vile woman, so Amelia thought for a second on how to spin her questions. "Can you explain how a radical aspect of the Unspeakables have a... I guess we could call it a '*dimensional passageway*', that leads from the Department of Mysteries to your wall?" She indicated the wall with her hand.

Delores stared at the ruined wall trying to understand what was being told to her. "A '*dimensional passageway*'?"

"Yes," Amelia said.

"The Unspeakables were spying on me?" she asked incredulously as that conclusion jumped to the forefront of her brain.

"Possibly." Amelia said, letting Delores go with that misdirection. "But, please remember who shares that wall with you."

"The Minister? His office is on the other side!" Delores' eyes bulged. Amelia was hoping to have the opportunity to splash another vial of the experimental calming draught in her face. "Cornelius must be informed of this at once!" Delores exclaimed just before another

thought came to her. "What did you mean when you mentioned a '*radical aspect of the Unspeakables*'?"

"Croaker is fighting to get into the Department of Mysteries since a radical group of the Unspeakables led by someone Croaker called '*Old Stu*' raised the wards barring anyone else entry earlier tonight."

"And did you even try to get ahold of Cornelius?" Delores asked accusingly.

Amelia returned with a cold glare. "I have sent a house-elf and an auror, Madam Undersecretary. Both of which were refused access to the Minister. Evidently, Cornelius is having one of his sequestered nights off. It was my impression that he is entertaining someone tonight and refuses to be disturbed."

The Undersecretary gave a pouting look of embarrassment and anger before deciding to just ignore Fudge's carnal activities for now. "It... it doesn't matter right now. I am his undersecretary. I can handle this adequately for him. Where is Croaker now?"

Amelia slightly raised an eyebrow. Delores had handled that better than she had expected. "I thought you understood, Madam Undersecretary. Croaker and the majority of his loyal Unspeakables are currently attempting to breach the wards to regain the Department of Mysteries."

"And why can't they just use this dimensional passageway you were talking about? They could just go in through the entrance in that wall and follow it back into the Department of Mysteries."

Amelia frowned. Delores was proving to be smarter than usual tonight.

"Pardon, Madam Bones, Madam Undersecretary." The Unspeakable known as Runekeeper stepped forward. "I overheard, and just wish to let you know that the doorway on this side of the wall is closed and cannot be opened from this side. I speculate it could only be opened on the inside of the '*dimensional passageway*', as I believe you called it."

"You don't know the term?" Delores asked, suspiciously.

"I do not know the term that Old Stu and his groups assigned this '*passageway*', so I will use the term Madam Bones provided until the rebel Unspeakables can be interrogated and their research notes examined."

The undersecretary sniffed at hearing this. "Then there's no telling how long these rebel Unspeakables have been spying on the Minister and myself. In fact, I insist on interrogating them myself when they are captured."

Amelia let out a long-suffering sigh. "Madam Undersecretary, you must remember that the Unspeakables have been given the right to govern their own members. It was part of the autonomy given to them in their charter. They do not have to give you or I any access to any of their members unless they choose to do so. They don't even have to give us the time of day unless they choose to."

Delores glared at her. "Well, we will just have to see about that. Charters can be changed just as well as laws."

"Actually, I think you will find it to be more difficult that you realize," Amelia said, now amused at the thought of the pink toad and the emerald minister trying to make the Unspeakables subservient to them. "I think you will get better results by just politely asking, Madam Undersecretary."

The ends of Delores' smile twitched. Even though it galled her, Delores turned to Unspeakable Runekeeper still standing there. "Unspeakable," she said in a sickly-sweet tone, "please pass on my request to Croaker that I wish to be present as I have questions of my own for these rogue members of your order."

Runekeeper nodded, the hood hiding her features, so that no one saw the amused face or the stuck-out tongue of the Unspeakable. Delores didn't have a clue that the Unspeakable in front of her was actually a muggle-born who had been in the same year with her in Hogwarts. Runekeeper had been in Ravenclaw while Umbridge had been in Slytherin. Umbridge had been very vocal about her thoughts about muggle-borns or those with creature-ancestry. She was especially

vocal when muggle-borns proved capable of receiving better grades than she did.

While Umbridge was distracted, Amelia Bones summoned one of her aurors, telling him that there was evidently a dangerous creature called a Umgubular Slashkilter roaming the Ministry halls. It was deadly and to use necessary force to take it down. Also, to contact Croaker to see if he could spare any of his Unspeakables to bring this thing to ground. She hoped that the Unspeakable would take claim of the creature so that she wouldn't have to deal with that matter as well.

As Delores glanced around at her ruined office, her eyes alighted on Harry Potter, a girl next to him that looked like a close relative, and a bushy head of hair that had proven to be a problem for her recently.

"You! You're that runaway that the Malfoys wanted! You, auror, take her into custody!" The undersecretary motioned for a nearby auror to obey her.

"Madam Undersecretary!" snapped Madam Bones, "do I have to remind you yet again that aurors are not yours to command?"

Delores Umbridge frowned. "Amelia, this child is a runaway from the *Solum Orphanage*. She was to be placed with an influential family when she ran off."

"You mean you sold her off to some twisted inbred Death Eaters and you don't want to have to give their galleons back," Jane coldly remarked.

Umbridge's face pinched tightly, though her voice was even more sickly sweet than ever. "I don't know what the poor deluded child was telling you, but the *Solum Orphanage* is just doing what is best for everyone."

"Best for everyone but her you mean," growled Harry, his eyes blazing green. "And every other muggle-born girl you've taken from their families."

"Ridiculous and unfounded accusations," Umbridge said, dismissively.

"Why, every girl in the *Solum Orphanage* was without a home. And the *Solum Orphanage* is managing to find home for all the young waifs. The *Solum Orphanage* is a small, but prestigious, organization, that sees to helping those that are helpless. I am proud to be one of the board members."

"You are an enslaver, and I think you have people in your organization using the *Imperious* curse to make the parents of muggle-borns sign over their children," Hermione finally spoke. "All so you can sell them off to the highest bidder to pure-blood monsters."

Delores gapped like a fish out of water for a moment. Her eyes darted to Amelia before turning back to the teen girl. "How... how dare you? The *Solum Orphanage* takes you in out of the kindness of our collective hearts, and this is the thanks we get. No wonder your parents wanted to get rid of you, you ungrateful wretch!"

"You will not talk that way to my betrothed!" Harry growled.

Delores had easily recognized the Boy-Who-Lived. She knew he was popular, but, in truth, he had no political power as yet. "What do you mean '*betrothed*'?"

Harry took Hermione's hand with the ring and raised it so that the witch could see. The fact that he used his hand that bore the Potter ring on it so that she could see that to was also intentional.

The undersecretary was now fuming. "You are a thief! You will be arrested for this and sent to Azkaban! You dare to interfere with the *Solum Orphanage* and the Ministry?! I know the family that purchased that girl! You have no idea what you have interfered with! Who do you think you are?"

Harry snorted in amusement. "I know they aren't aimed toward one of your age, but according to all this Harry Potter books that are being sold at *Flourish & Blotts* I'm the hero."

"He's definitely my hero," Hermione added, giving Harry a quick kiss to the cheek.

Jane leaned in close to the two pre-teens. "You'll have to explain

about the books to me later. It sounds like good ribbing material," she said, with a little amusement

For a second, the undersecretary wondered if they were crazy, but then decided she didn't care if they were. Umbridge then turned to Madame Bones. "Amelia, I must have the use of one or two of your aurors immediately. These miscreants have defied the plans of the Ministry and must be held accountable. I need your aurors to contain these... these.... troublemaking hellions as I try to rectify some of this."

Amelia had to struggle to keep from breaking into a grin. "Madam Undersecretary, you know I can't do that."

Umbridge's eyes hardened as she glared at Head of the Aurors. "Minister Fudge can have you removed from your position, Amelia. The Wizengamot does as he says."

Amelia looked right back at the toad-like woman. "He can try. But, from what I have been hearing here, you are trying to claim that he is involved with you and the *Solum Orphanage* in what sounds like very dodgy matters of a most immoral nature."

Delores snorted in disdain even as she leaned up against her broken desk. "There is no evidence that anything I have done is illegal. I am an upstanding citizen and a hard-working governmental figure trying to do the best that I can for the welfare of the citizens of the Magical World."

Professor McGonagall stepped forward until she was uncomfortably close to the pink toad-like ministry employee. "What you and this *Solum Orphanage* have been doing is vile and unforgivable. The good people of the Wizarding World will not stand for this disgusting practice." She leaned in closer making Delores lean back to be away from the professor and the magical aura she was projecting.

Just then, Umbridge's added weight in leaning against her damaged desk was just enough to cause a failure in the expansion charms on one of the drawers. An explosion of papers burst out of the desk and filled the air.

Umbridge stared in disbelief as the papers rained down. Realizing what some of those papers had on them, she pulled her wand and pointed at the falling papers, and started to say, '*Incendi—*'

Amelia casts silent stunner at Delores and watched as she fell face first onto the floor.

"And that is why I want my aurors to learn to perform silent casting; the spells may be weaker, but they are faster and give an element of surprise."

"Madame Bones, she will have your badge for that," stated one of her aurors who did not want Amelia to be replaced as he did not like the options for replacement.

Amelia raises an eyebrow. "A '*dimensional corridor*' for the Dept. of Mysteries, which is currently being held by rebels, leads to her office. The wall this '*corridor*' exits is the very same wall she shares with the Minister of Magic. And when paper work is suddenly revealed due to an accident, instead of gathering them all to herself, she tries to use a burning charm TO destroy them! That indicates she could actually be in league with this group of rebelling Unspeakables. We owe it to the oaths we took as aurors to examine this evidence thoroughly."

She looked around at aurors. "Doesn't anyone else find Umbridge's behavior suspect?"

Several aurors murmured their agreement while grinning like the cat that ate the canary. Umbridge was not a very popular person among the aurors who were often understaffed thanks to her budget cuts, as well as being treated like idiot peons who often had their hands slapped for arresting upstanding pure-blood leaders and then forced to let them go, despite the fact that their actions should have them in Azkaban for several years.

She pointed to two of her more competent aurors. "Get the undersecretary out of here. I want a disillusionment cast on her so no one sees who you are bringing in. Tell no one she has been arrested. Don't let anyone relieve you until I come and see you."

As the aurors with Umbridge left, Amelia waved her wand and made

all the papers form into four stacks, each three feet tall. "Damn, it's going to take a while to get through all that." She looked over the aurors in the room with her. "Auror Braat, I seem to remember you having better than average sorting skills. Start taking a cursory glance through some of these papers. I want something I can start working on sooner than later."

Hermione raised her hand. "Madame Bones, I am very good at researching. Could I help looking through the paperwork?"

Amelia frowned. Normally she wouldn't consider such a request from someone so young, but she had heard quite a bit about the girl and was extremely impressed. Even at the age she was, Hermione was probably more competent at paperwork than most of her aurors. Plus, the girl has a stake in this.

"Amelia," Minerva spoke. "She is exceptionally bright and could do quite well as aiding in sorting through this. I am also willing to look through these papers if it will quicken the safety of the girls that were taken from their families."

"Very well, Miss Granger. You and Professor McGonagall can help auror Braat for now."

The girl nodded her approval and turned to the auror to see how she wished for them to start. Minerva shared a small smile with Amelia before going to help her favorite student.

"Excuse me," said a voice from the damaged doorway. "Have I come at a bad time?"

The grey-haired Newton Scamander stood there wearing pajamas, robe and fuzzy bunny slippers while holding a carpet bag in one hand and using a cane to support himself in another. At his side was a house-elf that had transported him there.

"Newt!" shouted Xenophilius Lovegood. "Over here, man! The snorkack is severely wounded and I'm not altogether sure of the best way to treat him."

Newt glanced about at the destruction of Umbridge's office, taking

note of everything. The wizard was almost 95 years old, but, like Dumbledore, his mind was sharp. "Something definitely came through here," he said as he began to move forward, the house-elf clearing a path through the debris so that old wizard would not be impeded. Newt nodded to the aurors and the Unspeakable as he went past them, and wondered if this time the excitable Xeno had actually found one of the creatures. Xeno had tried to show him the mythical snorkacks four times already. The most embarrassing had been something that was called an animatron that Xeno had come across at a muggle resort called Disney something. Newt had been impressed with the place and he and his wife brought their grandkids a few months later.

Something to the side, half buried in some rubble, caught the magizoologist's eye. "Now this is curious."

With his cane, the old wizard moved a few of the small pieces of rubble away to reveal something he had never come across before. The dead creature looked like an inflated bumblebee merged with a type of squid.

"Oh, good, you found another one," said a young male voice. Harry Potter had come over to see what Scamander was looking at, but seeing the small creature, he bent down and picked it up to be one of its wings. Harry glanced back at Newt and said, "C'mon," and walked over towards Lord Lovegood.

Harry handed the dead creature to his cousin, Jane Potter. Jane winced briefly, but knew what Harry was thinking. She timed it so that Newt had time to hobble over before she knelt down next to the snorkack. "Mr. Scamander, this is a female Crumple-Horned Snorkack. She was injured while helping to defend me as we helped this... well, I want to call him a warrior-elf. I met them in another dimension that looks like a shadowy copy of this world. The Snorkack communicated with me in a kind of empathy-based telepathy. Best I can think to call it right now. Anyway, the Snorkack actually recruited me to help rescue Bo'antar, which is the name of the warrior-elf."

She indicated the armored muscular elf that lay on the floor a few feet away from the fallen Snorkack. Bo'antar was being tended by

several house-elves under the supervision of an ancient-looking house-elf. Newt nodded to those attending to the warrior-elf who seemed to have slipped off to unconsciousness.

Jane held up the dead creature from their wings by her fingertips. "This is a Wrackspurt. They seem to like to hover around people's heads and stick their tentacles in a person's ears. For humans, the results seem to be having a fuzzy head or you daydream, at least that is my experience. Definitely going to have a healer check out my ears after this. Anyway, wrackspurts are also what Snorkacks like to eat."

She began to lower the dead Wrackspurt for the injured Snorkack to consume, but was stopped by Newt's cane suddenly blocking the way.

"A moment, please," was all he said just before he placed his cane behind him as he began to sit on it. The cane instantly transfigured into a backless swivel chair on coasters which slowly lowered to a more manageable level for Newt to do an examination. He held his hand for the Snorkack to smell while he studied the creature's dazed eyes.

"What are you doing?" Jane finally asked.

Newt didn't even turn his head as he addressed the pre-teen's question. "Just making a diagnosis."

He managed to get to his feet with the help of a nearby auror and went to the remains of a couch. From his carpet bag, he pulled out a board used for filleting fish. "Here, put the Wrackspurt here on the board."

Jane frowned as she came over. "Are you planning to dissect it?"

"Hmm? No. No, though I wish I had time to do so. I prefer to study creatures alive, in their own environment if possible. I only resort to dissection as a last resort. And it has proved necessary on occasion. But, your Snorkack really needs nourishment if she is to heal. My concern is that she may be too weak to consume a whole Wrackspurt, thus I plan to quarter the Wrackspurt to make it easier."

Jane eyed the cutting board and finally set the dead wrackspurt

down. She stepped away when she noticed the Unspeakable stepping in close to see the dicing. Newt wasn't bothered by the Unspeakable at the moment knowing that the Unspeakable was just trying to learn firsthand what might spill out of a chopped up Wrackspurt since the Unspeakables had never encountered one before.

After Newt had severed the head, and then sliced the body of the Wrackspurt into three sections, he handed the fish filleting board to the girl. "I believe this should be manageable portions for your Snorkack friend."

Jane nodded as she took the severed pieces. Having started her training in potions making under Lily Potter's tutelage, she rarely became squeamish anymore. "Thank you."

Newt glanced over to Bo'antar, who was already being tended to most diligently by the house-elves. As much as Newt would love to study what they were doing, he knew his more immediate concern had to be that of the Snorkack. Slowly, Newt brought out his wand. He opened up his mind, trusting that the girl was right about the creature communicating with an empathy-based telepathy. He started with an outer diagnostic scan on the Snorkack, planning to move inward from there.

Jane stayed knelt near the Snorkack's head, speaking soothingly to the grievously injured creature while slowly feeding it. The barely conscious Snorkack seemed to barely be able to swallow which gave credence to Newt's plan to cut the Wrackspurt into smaller pieces.

"Madam Bones!" Hermione called out, as she read a paper in her hand.

"Miss Granger!"

"I have it!" she said, waving the paper in a manner that almost hit Harry in the head. "At least, I think I do. It's a list of eligible girls at the *Solum Orphanage*. There's a money amount next to each name, a date, and I am thinking the name of the family that have purchased them."

Amelia took the list and perused its content critically. She had

expected most of the names due to their known deviant nature, but a few surprised her. Whether they, too, had a secret twist in their closet, or maybe a real concern for the genetic continuation of their family line, she couldn't say just yet.

"Hmm, this is good for starters. We need more than this, though." She held up hand up when she saw that the girl was about to launch into a tirade of some sort. "The more proof we can gather, then the scum will have less that they can refute. Believe me when I say I want to nail these monsters just as much as you do."

Hermione stood glowering at her feet. She knew her emotions were raw, and that she was tired and upset. She also knew that taking her frustration out on the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement was not an intelligent thing either. She was standing there for another minute before she found herself being slowly enveloped into a hug by her friend, Harry Potter.

"Madam Bones," Harry said, quietly. "It has been a long day for us. We are all rather tired." He glanced over to his newfound cousin, Jane, who was focused on the injured Snorkack. "I know Professor McGonagall was going to take us somewhere else to spend the night, but..., could we stay somewhere in the building here. I know it will be dangerous with several higher up people connected to the *Solum Orphanage* probably wanting to find us. But Jane," he paused as he glanced at his cousin. "I think she is going to want to stay near the Snorkack and the new elf."

Amelia frowned as she thought about it. "It could be very risky."

Jane glanced over at the Head of the DMLE. "You could use our presence here at the Ministry as bait. Whoever comes looking for us is going to be tied up in this *Solum Orphanage* affair. It could help you capture more of the bloody bastards."

"Jane!" Hermione cried out. "Language!" She then paused. "Though that time it might have been appropriate."

Harry chuckled at her as did at least one of the aurors farther away.

Amelia considered for a moment, before turning to Minerva. Minerva

nodded to Amelia letting her know that she was open to whatever Amelia decided. "Very well. Let me consult with Mr. Scamander and see if and when he believes the Snorkack and Bo'antar can be moved and how. If he says they can be moved, I know of a good location in the building that should keep all of you safe."

Hermione was thrilled that everything seemed to be coming together. Harry was closest so she launched at him and hugged him tightly to the amusement of all present.



Department of Magical Law Enforcement Apparition Point

Sirius Black slumped as he was side-apparated into the Ministry building.

"That's been a while," he said in a scratchy voice that was unused to talking.

Auror Arnold Spencer stood to the side with his partner, Calvin Bumpass. Calvin was standing back, uneasy with this prison transfer from Azkaban.

Sirius straighten the best he could and then leaned against the wall as he caught his breath. "It's been a while since I was an auror. Shouldn't these cuffs be magical suppression cuffs? Not that I have the energy to use a wand even if one was handed to me, just wondering?"

Auror Spencer gave a wry grin at the scrawny, filthy wizard that looked like he was barely able to stand for long. "The head of the DMLE said to do it this way. She wants your ambient magic to begin work on healing you. Hopefully we can get a healer in here within a few hours to help with that, too."

Sirius lowered his head. "So, I guess this means someone found Peter."

"Peter?" asked Bumpass, growling. "You mean Pettigrew? The guy you blew up along with a dozen muggles?"

"Peter was the one who blew up the street!" Sirius barked back. "And

I saw him turn into a rat and escape down-" Anything else Sirius was going to say was stopped by a silencing spell fired by Bumpass.

"I may have had to bring him here, but that does not mean I have to listen to his filthy lies!" Bumpass snapped, pointing his wand at Black in a threatening gesture.

"Easy, Bumpass," Spencer stepped in, trying to calm his partner down. Calvin Bumpass had lost both parents, a sister and both sets of grandparents to Death Eaters during the war. He could be a quick wand, and was of the mind of Alister Moody of firing before getting fired on. "I told you that there was new evidence that Black is innocent."

"Innocent? You mean like Malfoy and Nott? Crabbe and Goyle? Flint and Grubber? Bah! He's just being bought out of Azkaban like the others!"

"He never had a trial, Bumpass. Crouch and the others just tossed him to Azkaban without even questioning him. I've seen the paperwork. Regardless, Bones is going to use veritaserum on him before deciding anything."

"I want to be there for that," Bumpass grumped.

"I'll let Bones know," Spencer stated, knowing his partner was cooling down.

"Now that that is over," Sirius said. "Can either of you two tell me how my godson is fairing? I haven't had a lot of communication where I was."

There was a growl and shouting from the next room. Spencer and Bumpass exchanged looks.

"Stay with the prisoner. I'll check it out," Bumpass said, turning to rush to the door.

No sooner had Bumpass got to the door, the door was torn off of its hinges and knocked him down even as a large dark creature was blasted into the room by a spell.

The creature was on four legs and was the size of a lion. It had no discernable eyes, ears or even a mouth yet it immediately seemed to track everyone in the room.

"Oh, Merlin be damned," muttered Sirius as he stared at this new horror to his life.

Spencer tried a *petrificus totalus* curse, but the beast proved to be resistant to magic.

"Try *wingardium leviosa*!" Sirius suggested. "Hit it with things!"

Someone outside the door was firing a purple and then a blue spell. Only the blue spell hit the creature, but it was not affected except to make it angry.

The creature's head seemed to peel open like a deranged flower with rows of teeth. It let out a howl that had those closest clutching their ears. Then it made a move towards Bumpass who was partially trapped under the door.

"Bullocks," Sirius groaned before turning into his dog animagus form and leaping at the hindquarters of the beast and taking a bite.

The creature turned to get to Padfoot, but the dog was too determined to live, and stayed at the creature's hindquarters, biting whenever possible.

Spencer, though surprised at his prisoner being a dog animagus, had taken Sirius' advice and was using the *wingardium leviosa* spell on couple of filing cabinets and the marble bust of an old forgotten pureblood.

"Get clear!" Spencer shouted, hoping the dog listened. As the filing cabinets and marble bust fell, Spencer was able to shoot off a quick *engorgio* at the marble bust.

The creature leapt to the side, just getting clipped by the enlarged marble bust. Snarling, it leapt back toward the open doorway, jumping on the fallen door that Bumpass was still under, before charging out, a yellow spell just missing it as it exited.

Spencer ran to the door, ready to fire, but the deadly creature had already made it past the aurors in the hall, one of which was nursing a bloody shoulder where he'd been bitten by the monster. Spencer considered joining the other aurors chasing after the creature, yet he knew his responsibility was to watch over the prisoner he'd just brought back. He glanced back into the room scanning for Sirius Black. He gave a sigh of relief when he spotted the black dog that looked uncomfortably like a Grim. The animagus was laying on the floor with part of a filing cabinet on his back legs.

Using his wand, he levitated the cabinet off Black as well as the door off of his partner Bumpass who had finally passed out due to the pain of two broken legs. Sirius Black, however, had a broken hip.

"Bloody hell, that was intense," Spencer said, before putting a numbing charm on Sirius. "Now don't change. If I remember my research, animagi should not change forms when having broken bones. You are just going to have to remain like this until we get you fixed up.

Padfoot whined and lowed his head on his forepaws. Meanwhile, Spencer went back to check on Bumpass.

"Watcher, Spencer," called out a young pink-haired auror trainee. "You all alright in here?"

"Two injured, Tonks," Spencer said as he tried to get his medical diagnostic spell going again. It was one of the spells he had the most problems with and always had to try three or five times before getting it to work correctly. "What the hell was that thing?"

"Thorson said Bones called it a Umgubular Slashkilter. I think I heard of it before, but I think it was from something I read in *The Quibbler*."

"Umgubular Slashkilter? What kind of name is that?"

"Dunno," she said, looking down at Bumpass. "He gonna be alright?"

"Yeah. Thought you didn't like Bumpass," he said, making conversation to calm himself down.

"I just didn't like him hitting on me all the time."

"You don't like older guys making passes at you?"

"I like older guys just fine, if they were well behaved. Well, mostly well behaved."

Spencer understood her frustration. He was one of the few people in the auror department that Tonks would talk openly with, and that was only because she knew he was happily married with kids and wouldn't do anything stupid to jeopardize that. He was glad that he was married, or he might have made a fool of himself making a pass or two at her as well. Metamorph females were as sought after as much as Veelas.

"Hey, what's the deal with the scruffy mutt?"

Spencer glanced back at the dog form of Sirius Black. "Believe it or not, that is a prisoner from Azkaban that I just brought here."

"A dog was kept prisoner at Azkaban?" Tonks said, looking confused. "What did he do, take a leak on the pantleg of Minister Fudge?"

There was an odd coughing sound from the dog that may have been laughter.

"The dog is actually an animagus. He helped fight off that Slashkilter thing before getting hurt. Probably saved Bumpass' life."

"Humph, I won't hold that against him," Tonks said, half seriously. She eyed the dog who was returning her look. "You know, he reminds me of a dog I knew when I was younger. I seem to remember..." She gasped, glancing to Spencer, then back to the dog. "Is that... why are... you can't..."

"Stop. What ever conclusion you have made, Bones wants this kept quiet. Evidence has come forth that he may be innocent of all charges, plus, it turns out that he never even had a trial or was even questioned."

Tonks stared aghast. "But that can't happen..., can it?"

Spencer shook his head. "A lot of things were happening when the war ended. People were so busy celebrating that a lot got lost in the

shuffle."

Tonks stared at the dog in disbelief. "My mother never did believe he turned traitor."

"Yeah, well, he hasn't been questioned under veritaserum yet, so we still have to treat him like a prisoner."

"Are you serious?" Tonks growled, turning to the auror.

"Easy, I've already brought him here with kid's gloves. I didn't even have magical suppression cuffs on, which is why he was able to change forms and help against that Slashkilter thing. This is all being down quietly so no one can move against him when Bones presents him before the Wizengamot for his trial to finally happen."

The witch fiddled with her wand as she thought. "What can I do to help?"

"Well, the healers will be here soon," Spencer commented. "You could lightly use some *scourgify* charms on him. That and some air freshener spells. I was going to have him in one of the tucked away cells that has a shower, but in his current condition he can't do it himself. As he is now, he stinks so bad the healers might refuse to treat him."

Sirius barked in complaint, but the other two just chuckled and went to work on doing what they could for the two injured people in the room.

"Oh, and right before that monster tore in here, Black was asking about news of his godson. Why don't you fill him in with what you know. It will probably make the time pass faster."

AuThOr'S NoTeS: 6-29-2019

Hey, there people. It has been a while. Over half a year. You may wonder what took me so long. Well, after the last chapter I posted, I was really hyped up because I was really happy with that chapter. But I only got 4 reviews, and every one of those was just to comment that for some reason a glitch had turned the entire story into one giant long paragraph. That just took away all desire to work on this. I've been trying to fan the flames

of creativity again, but recovering from that let down was difficult.

One of the things that did help was that I went to my first Comic Con. I took my eldest daughter and we went to the Emerald City Comic Con for 4 days. My wife even made it possible for us to get a picture with the kids from 'Stranger Things'. We would have gone to their stage interview, too, but it was already packed and had the doors closed. We did get to see the interviews for George Takei of 'Star Trek' and Gwendoline Christie of 'Game of Thrones'.

So, please, write a review. I'd love to hear your thoughts on the story. Thanks.

11. Chapter 11

Chapter 11

Author's Note – *This is to remind people that El or Eleven originally had been given the name of Jane by her mother, so that is what Lily and James called her when they took over her care at the age of eight.*

Warning – *There will be mention of rape and abuse. Nothing descriptive.*

6:15 am

Ministry of Magic, London

Newt Scamander eased around his patient who was now sleeping fitfully. Unfortunately, Newt was not finished treating at the wounds of the Snorkack.

Newt turned to quietly dig through his work bag, looking for the necessary ingredients. Unfortunately, the ninety-four-year-old man was coming up empty. He raced around the medical supplies in the aurors' medical wing the Amelia Bones had moved them to with a few guards sworn to secrecy. Moving silently behind Newt was the Unspeakable Runekeeper who followed Newt like a shadow and remained just as unobtrusive so the Unspeakable would be allowed to keep record of the medical attempts Newt used to heal the Snorkack.

When Newt had finished ransacking the last of the canisters, he took out a small muggle pad of paper and pen and began writing furiously.

"Jane?" he called.

Jane Potter, Harry's newly rediscovered cousin, jerked up from where she had about to nod off. On the other side of the room, Harry and Hermione were snuggled together in a chair under a blanket soundly asleep.

Stifling a yawn, Jane stood up from where she had been lying next to the Snorkack. She glanced around for Lord Lovegood only to realize that he had left while she had been resting her eyes. "Yes, Mr. Scamander?"

"Please call me Newt."

Jane took a moment to consider that. "Was there something you needed,... Newt?" It struck her odd to call someone so old by their first name; she didn't think someone like Dumbledore would like it if a child were to call him Albus to his face.

"I need someone to get some potion ingredients from one of the nearby labs. The aurors medical wing has at least three other potion labs. This one that Madam Bones placed us in was already running low on several ingredients, and at least three of those I needed have passed the expiration of being useful. I blame the underfunding caused by Fudge and his advisors." He handed her the parchment on which he had made a list.

She glanced over it and found it just slightly more legible than her own handwriting. "Ok, I should be able to locate these. Lily made sure I was well versed in identifying potion ingredients."

She tried not to think about the loss of her cousin James and his wife Lily. She still damned Voldemort for taking them away from her, and also Dumbledore for keeping her in a magical time stasis for ten years, making her not be there for Harry, who had been abused by Lily's sister and husband.

She took in a shaky breath as she went out the door. She had to focus on the fact that she still had Harry, even if he was now ten years older than he should be. But Harry had her and his friend Hermione to whom he was now betrothed. Amelia Bones was helping them to fix the many convoluted situations. She had to trust that Amelia would...

She spotted lots of activity at the first lab. There seemed to be several med-wizards and witches around a table. A table with a body on it. A very bloody body. Somewhere in her hearing she heard one of the people talking about the bite perimeter and the likelihood of poisons. It was as a med-witch was extracting a long broken off tooth from the would that Jane came to her senses enough to leave and look for one of the other labs, which she easily found.

She froze as she entered the potions lab. There was an auror there

with her wand out pointed at her, but Jane didn't even notice. All she had eyes for was the black-haired dog resting on the medical bed with its head up and staring at her.

The sharp bark startled her back to reality. "Sirius?" she whispered.

"All right, tell me who you are right now!" growled the auror, "or so help me-"

Jane didn't even turn to the auror. Instead, the auror just flew backwards into the wall, and stayed there, hanging inches from the ground, and her wand at her feet.

Jane hurried over to Sirius, stopping within a foot as her eyes scanned over him. He was filthy, even if there had been evidence of some cleaning charms trying to sanitize the dog. Also, in evidence was the dog's ribcage which seemed to almost tear through the dog's hide. But it was the canine's eye that spoke of the humanity inside as well as the horrors he must have experienced inside of Azkaban.

"It is you!" she exclaimed, both smiling and sobbing at once. She threw her arms around the black dog's neck and held him tight. Padfoot, not to be outdone, began licking her face enthusiastically.

"Stop! Stop! Stop it, Padfoot! Why don't you change back?"

"He can't," spoke the auror, still stuck on the wall.

Jane glanced back at the auror, surprised to see that she had pink hair, and then back at Sirius. "Why can't he change back?"

"His hip was broken earlier when a monster was rampaging through here," explained the auror. "A med-wizard vanished the hipbone and gave him some Skele-Gro. He can't change out of his animagus form for at least eighteen hours."

Jane cocked her head as she whipped her nose. "If I let you down, are you going to do something stupid, like arrest me?"

The auror glanced from the girl to the dog, and then back. "Nope."

Jane sighed and let the auror drop to her feet. The auror reached

down to get her wand, but managed to trip over a chair, and fall onto a trashcan.

Jane blinked in surprise as she wiped the blood from her nose. "Oh, Merlin! Nymphie? Is that you?"

The auror froze. "The name is Tonks! Not... did you just call me Nymphie?" she asked with a look of horror on her face.

"It is you!" Jane burst into a grin and a slight giggle. "And still as graceful as ever."

"Who are you?" demanded the pink-haired, red-faced auror.

"You haven't seen me since you turned nine," Jane spoke. "I've been held under a time stasis spell by Albus Dumble-dork, so I haven't really changed since you last saw me."

Tonks looked the girl over, surprised at this revelation. After a moment, she finally spoke. "Sorry, but I don't think I've ever seen you before in my life."

The girl's face fell. "Bloody Albus got to you, too. He wiped Minnie and Poppy of memories of me, also. I guess I shouldn't be surprised that he wiped your memories, too. You can ask one of them about it."

"Wait, what?"

Sirius barked twice drawing Jane's attention back to the dog. "Yes, I know you remember me, Padfoot. Dumble-dork probably didn't think it was necessary to mindwipe you since he helped railroad you to Azkaban."

Neither Jane nor Tonks had ever seen a dog with a shocked expression before. The sadness of the dog's features following that threatened to break both of the ladies' hearts. Both females hurried forward to comfort the dog.

It would be several minutes before Jane would remember why she had come there in the first place. Fortunately, Tonks was able to help her find all the necessary ingredients in record time.

Jane never even noticed the other auror, Backus, in the room, slightly snoring while under potions to heal.



9:35 am

Malfoy Manor

Lucius Malfoy paced in front of his fireplace in his private study.

His floo call with Minister Fudge bore no good news. Even though Fudge had known of the problems that they were having with the *Solum Orphanage* situation due to the escape of the Granger mudblood, Fudge still locked off all communication while having that tryst with that Clomast woman while his wife was away on a trip to Portugal. But now the ministry was in an uproar, and Fudge was looking for help in finding someone to blame.

Bones has evidently discovered the loyalty oath one of the aurors had made to Fudge. Now she was attempting to check everyone to discover where their allegiance truly was. If that wasn't bad enough, Fudge's Undersecretary's office had been destroyed due to some connection to the Department of Mysteries where some of the Unspeakables were staging a revolt. Fudge had kept asking him if he thought Delores was actually an Unspeakable, which Lucius seriously doubted and told the man so.

Also, most of the Ministry building was shut down due to so beast rampaging about inside. One of his spies at the front desk had told him that Walden Macnair was one of those trying to hunt down the creature. It was proving to be so difficult to capture the thing that numerous offices were being destroyed. Even worse, Macnair was reported to be actually smiling, frightening much of the remaining staff.

"Father," Draco said announcing himself as he stormed into his father's private study. "Is there any word on when I get a hold of that mudblood? All my friends already have theirs. I'm the only one that had their mudblood stolen from them."

A scowl crossed Lucius's face at his son's petty rant. "I have far greater concerns than you not having a mudblood to play with. The ministry is in an uproar. The Unspeakables are having a civil war. A deadly creature is tearing apart the Ministry building from the inside out. The Minister's effectiveness is being called into question. And Bones is bringing in all of the girls from the *Solum Orphanage*."

Draco snorted in mild amusement. "It's not like the girls can say anything. It's in their sales contract that the mudbloods can't complain about the treatment they receive."

"Don't be stupid, boy!" his father snarled.

Draco froze. He knew when his father called him 'boy' that he could lash out at any time, in any direction, and worst of all, at anyone. The last time he had lost his temper, a healer had had to be brought in to attend to Draco's mother. The time before the silver and gold chandelier had been destroyed and the antique oriental rug set on fire. And the time before that... his father had chased him with a poker from the fireplace.

"Only one mudblood is free to flap her mouth off, and guess who will be blamed for her freedom to do so?"

Draco wanted to say it was Potter's fault. Many things seemed to be Potter's fault. But, Draco thought if he tried to blame the half-blood this time, his father might chase him with the poker again. Or worse, use his wand on him.

"Uh, the mudblood Granger," he finally blurted out.

Lucius sniffed in disdain. "True, she is the fault of our troubles, however, our pure-blood colleagues would most likely focus their anger at this rise of new problems at our family since we were the ones to have let her slip away from us."

Draco almost blurted out a tirade of excuses that put the blame all on the mudblood and Potter, but he remembered just how close his father was to losing his temper. He thought about calling in that stupid house-elf Dobby for his father to take his anger out on, but the fireplace suddenly roared with green flames.

"Lucius! Lucius! The ministry is in chaos!" Fudge shouted from the flames until he saw the man he was looking for right at his desk.

"Greetings, minister. Yes, I have been hearing several disturbing reports this morning."

It was close to noon now, but Cornelius Fudge often came in late the next day after have a private tryst the night before.

"Perhaps you would like to come over," Lucius continued. "We can put our sources of information together and see if we can make any sense out of it."

Fudge's head nodded in the fire. "Yes, yes, that sounds like a grand plan! Just a moment while I tell people where I am going, and then I will floo right over." The minister's head disappeared.

Lucius called out, "Dobby!" As soon as the battered, groveling house-elf appeared, the elder Malfoy began to give out instructions. "And not the strong brandy, but a good one. And a large spread of cheeses and nuts. Some biscuits, too. I can't have Fudge overindulging today."

"What should I do father?" Draco asked after the house-elf popped away. He was hoping he could stay and see just how his father manipulated the minister. He would never admit it to anyone, but Draco did not find it easy to get people to do the things they should unless he threatened them. Even then, they didn't always do it. His father rarely threatened anyone. Of course, most people bent over backwards to appease the Malfoys.

"You?" his father said, one eyebrow raised. "You can go fly your broom for all I care. Just stay out of here and do not cause any more trouble. I have enough to fix as it is."

Draco wanted to protest. Before he could, the minister had come through the fireplace and was shaking soot off of his green bowler hat. His father stepped up and used his wand to remove any floo powder from the minister. Dobby, who had returned with the food and drink, quickly took the minister's hat and popped away.

Frowning, Draco turned and left as Fudge already began to bombard

Draco's father with all the woe he had experienced when he finally got to the ministry building.

Perhaps... if Draco could find a way to rectify this problem with the mudblood and Potter. Better yet, if Draco were to go and solve this problem himself, surely that would win his father's respect and lo... He decided to just focus on winning his father's respect.

Now he had to get to another floo and call his minions... er, friends.



10:07am

Madame Bones' office

Dept. of Magical Law Enforcement

Ministry of Magic building

Amelia Bones snatched the newest parchment out of the air before it even landed on her desk.

Her aurors, those she had checked for loyalty oaths, had been running all over to recover the girls taken by the *Solum Orphanage*. With the list of girls having been purchased found in Umbridge's office, finding most of the girls had been as simple as going to the home of the one who had bought her. Unfortunately, some of the girls had not been at the main home of the one who paid for them, but instead, at a different location. So far over eighty-nine of the girls had been brought back.

Fifty-three of the muggle-born girls had been from Hogwarts. Seventy-eight of the muggle-borns had been at some of the smaller schools spread around Great Britain. How the people behind this agenda thought they could get away with this is beyond her. Even with the corruption in the Wizengamot, that many muggle-borns suddenly removed from their parents, and then sold off to pure-bloods... Heads were going to roll!

Tears threatened her eyes as her read the lasted report that came to her from Auror Toadstool. She and her partner, Auror Burton, had

rescued Tiffany Crofton, a fifteen-year-old muggle-born who attended school at Highlands of Upper England School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Karlpott, the man who '*adopted*' Tiffany had placed her in his brothel with plans to sell her virginity to the highest bidder at the end of the week. The man had already sent out an advertisement to his richer clients. But, that was not before Tiffany had—

Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic, burst into the room, Amelia's secretary crying out in alarm. "Amelia! What has been going on? The aurors tried to keep me out of the building! They said they are hunting some wild creature!"

"The aurors should have stopped you, Cornelius. It would have been safer for you to floo to my office if you needed to see me," she admonished him as calmly as she could. She would have words with those aurors. Not only did they let the minister go thru a dangerous area, but she really didn't want to see him just yet as she was compiling information that could be used to arrest him, though she doubted she could get that to happen.

"Phht! A creature running around! That is a ridiculous story to use to keep people out of the ministry."

She gave him her my frosty glare. "I have five aurors that would disagree with you on that subject if it hadn't killed them. Eleven injured aurors have been sent to St. Mungo's if you want to hear their accounts of the beast."

The minister nervously fiddled with his hat. "It-it's real?" he croaked quietly, looking nervously at the door.

"Very much so."

"But... where did it come from?" he asked, the first thing to come to his mind.

A thought came to Amelia then of a chance to misdirect the minister, and maybe gain his unwitting aid in a few things. "It seems to have appeared in your undersecretary's office."

Cornelius' eyes widened in alarm. "I-I had heard that something

happened there. Could-" He paused to swallow the lump in his throat. "Could she be an Unspeakable? And what is this about an Unspeakable civil war?" He shook his head. "And why do they call it a civil war? Fighting isn't civil by any means."

Amelia groaned as Cornelius continued his tirade. She had blocked some of that information, but the minister had still learned about some of the Delores situation proving that she still had leaks in her department.

"Croaker insists he will have the insurgent Unspeakables under control soon."

"How many aurors do you have down in the Department of Mysteries on this matter right now?"

She stared at him. "None."

"None?" he asked incredulously.

"The Department of Mysteries is autonomous. I have virtually no authority there unless Croaker or whoever the Head Unspeakable is allows my and my aurors to come aid them. And so far, Croaker wishes his own people to handle it."

"Who gave the Department of Mysteries autonomy in the first place?" Cornelius demanded, wanting someone to blame.

"That would be the Wizengamot in the late 1500's I believe. It could be the early 1600's though."

Fudge frowned. In the back of his mind he thought to look into revoking that autonomy and get the Department of Mysteries back in line with the rest of the ministry. Right now he didn't want to have anything to do with the creature terrorizing the ministry. He was going to stay out of the Unspeakable civil war, too, even if Croaker says it is almost over. That just left one last thing on his agenda for him to deal with.

"Amelia, what is all this nonsense about the *Solum Orphanage*?"

The glare she gave him struck cold and he actually took a step back.

"One hundred and thirty-one witches from muggle families were all dropped off at the so-called orphanage within three weeks of each other. Their parents all turned them over saying that they were unable to coexist with a magical child."

"That-that is a sad thing. Fortunately, the *Solum*-"

"You don't think that it was strange that so many muggle parents would sign over their children like that?"

"I never could understand muggles," he chuckled.

"And you don't find it strange that only witches were given to the orphanage?"

"Pardon?"

"One hundred and thirty-one daughters were suddenly brought forward, but none of the families signed away the rights of their sons? There have been several families that have both witches and wizards for children for, and yet they only gave up their daughters."

"Wh-what are you getting at, Amelia?"

"These families had the *imperio* curse placed on them, Cornelius."

"That's a huge allegation," Fudge said, sternly. "I hope you can back it up."

"I have the testimony of at least one of the witches that had been taken to the *Solum Orphanage*. She managed to escape before a binding contract could be placed on her to keep her from revealing all of what was going on."

Fudge cringed inside. "One testimony is not enough."

"I also have a record of sales of these girls. Some of which had been recorded as being available a week or more before their parents brought them to the orphanage."

He wanted to say that it was circumstantial, but knew better than to argue that right then. "Where did you get such a record?"

She grinned like a Cheshire cat. "Umbridge accidentally made it available." She paused and added a dig to the minister. "I suppose it is possible that she is secretly an Unspeakable, and was covertly making the information available."

Fudge cringed as his anxiety increased. He decided to switch tactics. "As I understand it, the way it was presented to me, the *Solum Orphanage* was supposed to be implementing a way for muggle-born girls that no longer have families to become part of a wizarding family." He smiled graciously, thinking he had chosen his words well.

The look he received told him he had been mistaken.

"Due to the questionability of how this was done," she began, "I've had my aurors investigate the living conditions of the girls that had been taken and retrieve them if they were in any way being neglected or abused."

"Hmm, I suppose that is understandable. But having just moved into a new household, there are bound to be a few issues adapting," he said, hoping he was leading the conversation to more friendly waters.

"Of the one hundred and two homes examined so far, only eighty-three were there. Those eighty-three were all removed. Most have been subjected to hexes and curses. Several were beaten. Sometimes even by the children in the household."

"I'm sure it-it couldn't have been all that bad," Fudge said, sweat breaking out on his brow. "I hear some families have some difficulties accepting new members. I'm sure that these girls will... will adapt and bring fresh blood to the pureblood families."

"How will that be possible when several of these young girls have had the sterility curse placed on them after entering these new homes."

"Sterility?" Cornelius blanched. "I..."

"Even though these young ladies have only been in these homes less than twenty-four hours, not only have they been abused, but several have been raped."

Fudge took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow.

"But let's look at how this affects you," Madam Bones said.

Cornelius gripped his hat tightly, wondering if he was going to have to use the portkey placed on it. Then he wondered if the portkey would even allow him out of Amelia's office.

Amelia lifted her most recent document she had received from her aurors. "This concerns Tiffany Crofton. A fifteen-year-old girl from one of the smaller schools up north. Like many others, her mother brought her to the so-called '*orphanage*' and requested that they take her and that she be obliterated so she would not know of the wizarding world, just like all the other parents did. Tiffany had been purchased by Hasting Moorwaters. I believe you know Moorwaters, minister."

Cornelius grimaced. Moorwaters had been in his house and year at Hogwarts until Fifth Year, when Moorwaters didn't come back. Cornelius and his housemates had speculated on what happened to him, but were relieved not to have to put up with him anymore. Later they would learn that the Moorwaters family had started up several brothels, both in the muggle and Wizarding world.

"Moorwaters took six girls from *Solum*. Five were virgins and placed in one of his brothels. The other girl, Abigale Banks, was taken to his home where she was repeatedly raped. The other five girls were locked in rooms. Photos were taken and advertisements made to sell their virginity to customers at the brothel in a weeks time."

Fudge was now biting the brim of his hat. This was nothing like what he had been told.

"Despite the forced contracts that *Solum* had used to force the girls to be compliant, Tiffany Crofton was able to fight off a rapist who broke into her room. Owen Stile is a repeat offender that always seems to get off of whatever we have busted him for because of people he knows. But, when Tiffany managed to hurt him with a corkscrew, he retaliated hard. So hard that when my aurors tracked her and the other girls to the brothel, they had to do a blood heredity test to identify her since she was unconscious."

"That-that's terrible," Cornelius managed to say.

Amelia let her glare ease as she let out a sigh. "This is where it affects you, Cornelius."

Fudge prepared himself to say the phrase to set off the portkey.

"Tiffany was not muggle-born."

"What?" he managed to say, lowering his hat.

Amelia sighed heavily again. "The heredity test revealed who her father was."

" 'Was'?"

"Tiffany's father died when her mother was four months pregnant with her."

"And how does this affect me?"

"Her father was Cassius Fudge, your brother."

Fudge dropped his hat. "Cassius?" he whispered.

While Cornelius had been a politician, Cassius had been one of the fiercest aurors in the department. He was considered a superstar, even when he died saving the small wizarding town of *Duck's Row* from an attack by an overwhelming number of Death Eaters. The remaining townspeople renamed the town to *Cassius' Corner* in his honor. It had been due to a large part of Cassius' feats that Cornelius was able to become Minister of Magic. And Cornelius knew it.

"Cassius had-had a daughter?" he managed to say. "I-I-I never knew."

Amelia hated feeling sorry for Fudge. She knew a large part of this mess was because of him, even if she doubted she could ever prove it. "From the information we were able to gather, Cassius met Tiffany's mother after saving her from an attack by her family, the Notts."

"An attack? Why?" was all the surprised minister could say.

"Penelope Nott was a squib. And the Notts are one of those families that do not take well to squibs being produced in their family line.

She was little better than a house-elf to them. When she escaped, her family chased her down. Cassius arrived on the scene and rescued her."

Cornelius managed a chuckle. "That was Cassius' style. Always the hero."

Amelia, having known Cassius, nodded in agreement. "Anyway, Cassius rescued her, and when he realized she had nowhere to go or even a means to support herself, he helped set her up. The Notts were not happy about their squib being taken from them, and tried to take her back on a couple occasions. This led to Cassius moving Penelope into the muggle world where her family could not find her. Somewhere in that time, Cassius and Penelope fell in love."

"Oh, our father would have loved that! Cassius in love with a squib!" Fudge chuckled, wiping a tear from his eye.

"Which is why they didn't get married, though they were planning to."

Cornelius looked thoughtful for a moment. "I remember one of the last things he told me was that he had something special he wanted to tell me, but that he wanted to keep it secret for a little while longer." He gave a slight shake of his head. "I guess I finally know what he was going to tell me now."

Amelia had brought out a bottle of fire-whiskey from somewhere and poured him a small cup full. The minister quickly downed the drink. The burning in his throat and the small burst of flames from his mouth cleared his mind some.

"What would you have me do?" he finally asked.

Amelia gave a half-chuckle. "That would be a long list, minister. But first, you need to help Tiffany. She has lost her mother since Penelope's memory was wiped, and she has never known her father, and the ministry has basically allowed the *Solum Orphanage* to sell her to a brothel. She had been badly beaten and lost an eye. She-

"She lost her eye!"

"Owen Stile is a right brutal bastard. And no doubt he has already made a call out to friends to get him freed."

"You are not letting him out!" the man shouted.

"I do not plan to," she said. "I am just letting you know the situation. As for Tiffany, *St. Mungo's* will be contacting any relatives they can find to take her in. Her only relatives are you and the Notts."

"She is not going to the Notts!" Fudge shouted, surprising himself. He'd have to talk to his wife; but she could be very caring when she wants to be.

"Good, this girl, like all the others, has had enough trauma; none of them need any more."

Amelia slipped a photo over to the minister.

Steeling himself, the minister took it expecting to see his injured niece in a hospital bed. Instead it was of a bright, happy teenage girl waving at the camera. Cornelius' heart about broke. "She looks like Corona," he said in nearly a whisper.

Corona Fudge had been the little sister in the family, and died unexpectedly from dragon pox. After her death, the Fudge family were barely willing to stand each other.

"Her hair is somewhat darker, but the likeness..." He had to wipe away several more tears.

"Minister, we have done several more heredity tests on the girls we recovered." She paused. "Some appear to be of old squib lines returning to magic, some are just brand new magical lines, but a few... I believe are the product of muggle women being raped and then obliviated."

Cornelius never regretted being the minister of magic more than he did that day. "Amelia, I ask you, what do you want me to do?"



10:47 am

Department of Mysteries

Unspeakable Stu Curmudgeon scowled at the reading he was getting from their defense shields. "Damn Croaker and his sanctimonious ethics!" He hurried over to his scrying tablet which was more of a viewing portal that he had stumbled upon in his younger years as an Unspeakable and kept to himself.

All he had wanted was to examine the Potter girl. And maybe vivisect her a bit. He fully planned to put her back together again. He just wanted to know what made her able to do what she could do.

And now his scrying table has shown even more incredible things that she has done.

Somehow Jane Potter had gone into the *Veil of Death* and forced herself out in another location.

"Knot-Weaver," one of his cohorts said as they entered Stu's office.

Stu closed the tablet and shoved it into one of many expandable pockets in his robes. "What is it, Chalk-Writer?"

"The others... and I, we are concerned."

"As well we all should. Croaker is impeding the true heart of the Unspeakables. Knowledge is our food. Learning is our lifeblood. Nothing should be allowed to hinder that."

"Number-Cruncher does not think the barriers will keep our wayward brethren out much longer. She estimates we will be breached in seven to eight minutes."

Stu snorted, acknowledging that he heard. "Then we must grab what we need and leave."

"Leave how?" Chalk-Writer asked.

Stu didn't answer. Instead he grabbed a pepper-up potion and drank it down as he walked out of the room, making Chalk-Writer back up to let him exit. The steam poured out of his ears as he turned to address his followers.

"True Believers, we must endure to learn more. We must continue to become more. Croaker and his like are weak. Even so, they will overcome us if we remain here."

"Tell us your plan," called out Scribe-Reader, from the back, one of the most pathological of Stu's followers.

"We will follow the path the girl made." Turning toward a massive chalkboard, he cleared its writings. Pulling out a small device that resembled a small telescope, he placed it to his eye. The other end of the telescope projected an image onto the chalkboard. In that image, Jane could be seen going through the *Veil of Death*.

"You want us to commit suicide!?" called out a voice in the back. A voice Stu was sure belonged to Soul-Tracer.

"Keep watching," Stu stated calmly, a small smile appearing on his lips.

The room watched in stunned silence as the subject, Jane Potter, appeared to use an unknown creature as a battering ram to break through a dimensional barrier. A few other life forms also made it through the rift before it seemed to heal itself closed.

"As you can see, the *Veil of Death* is much more than we believed. I propose we venture thru it to follow whatever trail the Potter subject made to escape our brethren as well as to gain more knowledge."

Heads turned to one another, a few silent conversations occurred, and in less than a minute, they all agreed.

"Very well, my colleagues. Let us go to this undiscovered country! Excelsior!"

AuThOr'S NoTeS: 11-15-2019

I can't say much. I have to hurry to go drive 2 hours to pick up one of my daughter's friends for a birthday party. My wife is still recovering from her surgery, and has been sick on top of that. I took her to her class where she teaches every Thursday night, and she threw up three times on the way home.

But on the story, I am sorry to take so long. Way longer than I thought. I have too many stories going on. Anyway, I hope you like it. I have to run. The ladies of the home are really wanting to go and I have to post this.